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# RENASCENCE

A Critical Journal  
of Letters



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# RENASCENCE

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# RENAISSANCE

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# London Letter

By JOHN PICK

EVER since the days of Newman, English Catholicism has been fortunate in its distinguished converts, and the news of the reception of Dame Edith Sitwell has added another star to the galaxy, another voice to the choir. I found her deeply interested in *Renascence* and appreciative of the article "Clown and Canticle: The Achievement of Edith Sitwell" which the magazine carried several years ago.

Those who have followed carefully the progress of the poetry of Edith Sitwell should not be completely surprised by her announcement, "I have taken this step because I want the discipline, the fire and the authority of the Church." It was a fulfillment of the prophetic lines—even the image of fire is anticipated—from "Invocation":

I who was once a golden woman like those who walk  
In the dark heavens—but am now grown old  
And sit by the fire, and see the fire grow cold,  
Watch the dark fields for a rebirth of faith and wonder.

The poem was dedicated to Alec Guinness who was received eight months later than Edith Sitwell, whose poem had concluded:

—O Spirit moving upon the waters,  
Your peace instil  
... in the night  
The Holy Ghost speaks in the whispering leaves.  
Bring peace to the famine of the heart and lips,  
And to the Last Man's loneliness

Of those who dream they can bring back sight to the blind!

Some years ago she had proudly written of the Sitwell family, whose motto is "I disdain to change or fear," that its heritage was "blood which in its very pulsing ever showed steadfastness and a peculiar loyalty to tradition." Now she need not withdraw this comment, for she has, of course returned to one of the oldest traditions in Britain.

The history of her poetic career is the story of her growth and development. Perhaps, as John Lehman has observed, the one thing profoundly true of her is that, "Above all, she has never remained set." The differences between her early *Façade* and her recent *Canticle of the Rose* have tempted some critics to consider them works by entirely different poets. Thus John Piper has characterized her first work as having the atmosphere of a fairy-tale life, elegant, witty and fragile which made it impossible for even her most enthusiastic admirers to foresee her later development in such volumes as *Street Songs* (1942), and *Green Song and Other Poems* (1944) where truly great replaced merely exquisite poetry. To

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him—and many will share his feeling—her earlier poetry was written from a strange secluded world where one pictures her imprisoned in an enormous garden where there is a summer house haunted by Chinoiserie ghosts. No human beings enter this garden, except a governess and an ancient gardener, but in the corner is a gazebo from which it is possible to catch sight of the neighbors, queer country eccentrics, as they go to call on the great house. "In this garden the young lady lives in a kind of trance of sensuous receptivity." Later she grows up and leaves her garden to live in the world of important poetic issues.

Stephen Spender has a similar view when he contrasts with her war poetry her poetry of the 1920's: "Her poetry had at this time a hard, brittle quality; it created a world inhabited by maid-servants, gardeners, ladies, all of them toylike creatures in an artificial landscape." In the poetry of this time there were glimpses of tenderness and pity, but in her later work she developed this latent sympathy and it broadened into a stream of significant song.

These observations are worthy of careful examination. Her early work, epitomized by the poem-cycle *Façade*, was recited in London in 1923 in Aeolian Hall behind a screen decorated with a mask through which she spoke to the accompaniment of music by William Walton. Once notorious, the cycle is now famous.

Most critics have viewed *Façade* as an attempt to say nothing beautifully. Thus one has written that these poems were dazzling experiments in sound and rhythm, even if their meaning was little more than that—that her early poems were an artificial game—while another summed up, "The *Façade* poems are nearly all witty nonsense in witty and clever metrical forms."

Her own remarks in "Some Notes on My Own Poetry" (henceforth referred to as "Notes"), in which she reviews her own development, have undoubtedly encouraged these views, for she writes, "The poems in *Façade* are *abstract* poems—that is, they are patterns in sound. They are, too, in many cases, virtuoso exercises in technique . . ." She even goes so far as to suggest that *Façade* is "the poetry of childhood overtaken by a technician."

Such autobiographical comments have helped to obscure a core of very serious intent in the early poems, an intent which she also touches on in her "Notes" when she says, "Some of these poems are about materialism and the world crumbling into dust . . . At that time I was much occupied in examining the meaning of material phenomena and attempting to see what they revealed to us of the spiritual world."

Similarly she had written in a preface to an early printed version of *Façade*: "This modern world is but a thin match-board flooring spread over a shallow hell. For Dante's hell has faded, is dead. Hell is no vastness; there are no devils who laugh or who weep—only the maimed dwarfs of this life, terrible

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straining mechanisms crouching in trivial sands, and laughing at the giants' crumbling!"

Two lines from a later poem summarize much of the spirit of these early poems:

Behind the façade  
The worm is jailer

**B**UT even if critics quarrel about the depth or significance of serious theme in *Façade* they are united in seeing a great advance in her next great poetic landmark, *Gold Coast Customs*, 1929, in which they are in unison in heralding the emergence of a significant artist. One of them has expressed the matter thus: "'Gold Coast Customs' . . . terminated her experiments with rhythms *per se*, and adumbrated the deep concern with 'the proper study of mankind' which marks the sybilline poetry of her past decade or so." The poem of 1929 draws a parallel between the rites of a predatory cannibal tribe and the society world of Lady Bambergher, an indictment of modern civilization.

Again, possibly the best guide to the intent of the work is her own "Notes" where she writes of her own development: "My experiences led, eventually, to the poem 'Gold Coast Customs'. It is a poem about the state that led up to the Second World War. It is a definite prophecy of what would arise from such a state—what *has arisen* . . .

. . . Do we smell and see

The sick thick smoke of London burning . . .

In this poem the bottom of the world has fallen out."

She expands:

We see everything reduced to the primal mud—the 'rich man Judas, brother Cain,' and the epitome of this civilisation, Lady Bambergher, are at one with the slum-ignorance and the blackness and superstition of the African swamp. The beating of their fevered hearts and pulses is no more than the beating of the drums that heralded the customs, as they were called in Ashantee, a hundred and fifty years ago, when, at the death of any rich or important person, slaves and poor persons were killed so that the bones of the dead might be washed by human blood. So, the spiritual dead-in-life cry, in our time, for a sacrifice—that of the starved . . . These are sacrificed, watched by the appalling dumb agony of

. . . the rat-eaten bones

Of a fashionable God that lived not

Ever, but still has bones to rot.

The high seriousness of her objective is suggested strongly in her words: "Throughout the poem, I have tried to produce, not so much the record of a world as the wounded and suffering soul of that world, its living evocation, not its history . . ."

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She was also quick to point out in the same "Notes" that the poem ends on a strongly positive and affirmative note:

Yet the time will come  
To the heart's dark slum  
When the rich man's gold and the rich man's wheat  
Will grow in the street, that the starved may eat—  
And the sea of the rich will give up its dead—  
And the last blood and fire from my side will be shed.  
For the fires of God go marching on.

Critics have grasped the opportunity to compare this poem with the earlier work. Lehman, for instance, says that the contrast between "Gold Coast Customs" and such poems as "The Soldan's Song" is a revelation of the range of Edith Sitwell's poetic prowess. C. M. Bowra holds that the later poem marks in a sense the end of a long period of experiment, that technically it shows all her consummate craft. Spiritually, it is her most powerful indictment of modern life, her deepest criticism of the world which greeted her when she left her dreams of childhood. Through her choice of symbols Edith Sitwell found a way to speak from her inmost heart about the savagery and brutality of the world around her. The negroes come from Hegel who in his *Philosophy of History* describes African natives who have no belief whatsoever in the value of human life and therefore no belief in justice or morality, or freedom or the immortality of the soul. The fundamental principle which Hegel finds in them is the desire to sate the senses, and of this their cannibalism is an example. Edith Sitwell takes this barbarous man-eating world as her symbol of modern life and weaves a pattern in which the themes of the two societies, African and European, barbarous and 'civilized,' are inextricably identified. The savagery of the one is but a sign of the more corrupt savagery of the other. Behind this musical structure one can detect a hard intellectual framework. The poem is thus much more than an effect of sound. It is a world in which there is no God, no joy, no real life. But behind the false idols there is still the Christ who takes away "sin and the rich man's bone-dead grin." These secret forces are hardly at work, but they exist, and one day they will merge in a fearful cleansing, "For the fires of God go marching on."

To still another critic, L. P. Hartley, "Gold Coast Customs" marks a turning point in her poetic development. It is a kind of watershed dividing the stream of her work into two valleys. In one there is no explicit and comparatively little underlying philosophy. Things perceived through the senses wear their face value almost unrelated to human emotions, saved from abstraction only by the vague pathos. The later poems are so different in intention that they might almost be the work of another mind; their appeal is to the mind and the heart. They are utterly serious, not only as works of art—Edith Sitwell has always been a serious artist—but as criticism of life.

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Still another way of saying this is in the words of a B.B.C. broadcast to Germany: "The early poetry of Edith Sitwell is the poetry of an enchanted garden. It was in 'Gold Coast Customs' that a change came over her work: the outer world, with all its sufferings and struggle had broken into the enchanted garden."

But there was an intermission, a hiatus, between the writing of "Gold Coast Customs" in 1929 and the appearance of her war poems, during which Edith Sitwell kept poetic silence. There have been various explanations. In *Laughter in the Next Room*, Sir Osbert says of his sister's life during the thirties:

Alas, after 1929 began the long mortal illness of her old friend Helen Rootham. And in the next decade, until Helen's death in 1938, the concern my sister felt for her, and the necessity she found herself under to earn money, compelled her to turn away from the natural expression of her being, toward prose: for some years she was obliged to abandon poetry.

HER next poetry brought universal acclaim, her two war-time volumes, *Street Songs* (1942) and *Green Song and Other Poems* (1944). Once again we fall back on her own reflections:

After "Gold Coast Customs" I wrote no poetry for several years . . . Then, after a year of war, I began to write again—of the state of the world, of the terrible Rain  
Dark as the world of man, black as our loss—  
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails  
Upon the Cross—

falling alike upon guilty and guiltless, upon Dives and Lazarus. I wrote of the sufferings of Christ, the Starved Man hung upon the Cross, the God of the Poor Man, who bears in Him all wounds.

She added very significantly: "My time of experiments was done."

More than one critic has singled out "Still Falls the Rain," from which I just quoted as "the most profound and most moving poem written in England about the war." Bowra comments that though it was inspired by the air-raids of 1940, it has nothing transitory or merely contemporary about it. It is an intense, highly imaginative and tragic poem on the sufferings of man; this suffering, so hideous and yet in some ways so inevitable and so deserved, is not hopeless or irretrievable. The falling blood is like the blood of Christ and brings redemption even to those who have inflicted the wounds. When the dawn comes,

Then sounds the voice of One who like the heart of man  
Was once a child who among beasts has lain—  
'Still do I love, still shed my innocent light,  
my Blood for thee.'

Thus destruction wrought by the air-raids is transformed into an example of man's wickedness and punishment and redemption. So Edith Sitwell passes beyond the horror of the present moment to a vision of its significance in the

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spiritual history of man and through her compassion for him finds a ray of hope for his future.

Lehman has called it, "one of the most memorable of all Edith Sitwell's poem's and has pointed out that in this great achievement the poet openly declares her Christian faith, and conceives the falling of the bombs as a rain which is at the same time the falling of blood from Christ's side, a rain which thus becomes a symbol of punishment and suffering and redemption through that suffering. There are truly magnificent lines such as:

Still falls the Rain—  
Then—O Ile leape up to my God: who pulles me doune—  
See, see where Christ's blood streames in the  
firmament:  
It flows from the Brow we nailed upon the tree  
Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart  
That holds the fires of the world—dark-smirched  
with pain  
As Caesar's laurel crown.

In tracing her development there is an obvious importance in Hartley's observation. "This is one of the few instances in which Miss Sitwell makes open avowal of the Christian faith."

This is further confirmed by a glance at other poems from the two war volumes. New-born as a poet, her advance over her earlier poetry is summarized in part by Bowra: she no longer startles, no longer shocks. Even the old-fashioned must feel that she now joined the great tradition of English poetry and created something of universal significance and wide human appeal. It has a new humanity, a deeper sense of suffering and a more philosophical outlook. It shows above all deep religious trust. Her perfected technique is used to convey experiences of tragic grandeur and intensity. In these two volumes she became "an inspired voice that spoke for all the spiritual distress and longing of an agonized generation."

To Wykes-Joyce the theme of *Green Song and Other Poems* rhapsodizes all-powerful Love: in one poem Love overcomes Death, in another Time, in yet another the Fall of Man. In another poem Love is mystically identified with that 'Intelligible Light' in which Aquinas apprehended God. Christ the slain Son is resurrected in Christ the Living Sun:

Old people at evening sitting in the doorways  
See in a broken window of the slum  
The Burning Bush reflected, and the crumb  
For the starving bird is part of the broken Body  
Of Christ who forgives—He with the bright Hair  
—The Sun whose Body was spilt on our fields to  
bring us harvest.

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Edith Sitwell passes through harrowing doubts, as one commentator has remarked, to a constructive outlook. She uses the symbols of the Christian faith in the Crucified whose wounds are on every hand, in the Holy Ghost who speaks at night "in the whispering leaves," in the angels who sing through the earth. For her the earth is a manifestation of God himself. She sees in the events of physical nature the manifestations of spiritual power. Just as in Spring the Sun revives decayed life and creates hope in men and women, so in the spirit the "Intelligible Light" works its miraculous transformations and turns all to gold

... the Intelligible Light  
Turns all to gold, the apple, the dust,  
the unripe wheat-ear.

This miraculous change can only be called divine, and that is why she associates it with the symbols of Christian faith and shows how

... the claws of the lion  
Bear now on their palms the wound of the Crucified

or finds in so simple an act as the gift of a crumb to a starving bird a symbol of the breaking of the Body of Christ.

She comes to the exalted conclusion:

He is the sea of ripeness, and the sweet apple's  
emerald lore.  
So you, my flame of grass, my root of the world from  
which all Spring shall grow,  
O you, my hawthorn bough of the stars, now leaning  
low  
Through the day, for your flowers to kiss, my lips,  
shall know  
He is the core of the heart of Love, and He, beyond  
labouring seas, our ultimate show.

In another she calls out:

... with the voice of Fire I cry—  
Will He disdain that flower of the world, the  
heart of Man?

No wonder that Piper asserts that in these late poems "Miss Sitwell is essentially a religious poet."

**E**VEN later than *Street Song* and *Green Song* came "The Shadow of Cain." Again the best account of her development and intention is in her "Notes":

Before the time came for "The Shadow of Cain" to be written, various of my poems spoke of the change from the worship of the holy, living, life-giving gold of the wheat to the destructive gala of Dives . . . In "The Shadow of Cain," however, we moved still farther from the sun that is Christ and the Sun of the heart.

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This poem is about the fission of the world into warring particles, destroying and self-destructive. It is about the gradual migrations of mankind, after that Second Fall of Man that took the form of the separation of brother and brother, of Cain and Abel, of nation and nation, of the rich and the poor—the spiritual migration of these into the desert of the Cold, towards the final disaster, the first symbol of which fell in Hiroshima.

If the poem sounds like a negative indictment of the modern world, it is more important to note that she calls upon the most powerful symbols of love she knows, the symbols of Christianity, and that the last lines of the poem ask

... who dreamed that Christ died in vain?

He walks again on the Seas of Blood, He comes  
in the terrible Rain.

In this poem Christian symbols have indeed gained ascendancy and she becomes a religious poet because only thus could she continue to write for this generation without being overcome by despair.

Finally, her very last poems entitled *The Canticle of the Rose* are even more positive, more full of Christian hope:

And we from death on death shall rise again  
To testify against the heart of Man  
That dreamed our darkness could present a dam  
To the Sea that comes—the infinite Blood of Christ.

The title poem of her latest volume brings to a titanic close her effort to achieve the unity of man through Christ, Universal Love:

But high up on the wall  
The Rose where the wounds of Christ are red  
Cries to the light  
'See how I rise upon my stem, ineffable bright  
Effulgence of bright essence . . . From my little span  
To cry of Christ, Who is the Ultimate Fire  
Who will burn away the cold in the heart of man . . .  
Springs come, springs go . . .  
'I was redder on Rode than the Rose in the rayne.'  
'This smel is Crist, clepid the plantynge of the  
Rose in Jerico.'

Such, then, has been the growth and development, both technical and thematic, of Edith Sitwell since the days when she recited *Façade* in London in 1923. It is not surprising, then, that last year she announced her reception as a Catholic, "I have taken this step because I want the discipline, the fire and the authority of the Church." And one hopes that it is that fire that will be expressed in the poems she will write as a Catholic.

If I have sketched the development of Dame Edith at such length it is because she is too often thought of in terms of her earliest work and also because



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her conversion has meant the addition of one of England's leading poets to the Catholic revival.

ALFRED NOYES, another convert, in his recent autobiography, *Two Worlds for Memory*, tells of his quarrels with her in the 1920's when, he says, she "wore a gold laurel wreath and looked remarkably like a female Dante." The book is packed with literary reminiscences, going back as far as Swinburne. Noyes, now in his seventy-sixth year, has announced a new volume of poems, *A Letter to Lucian*, soon to be published, and during the past year he brought out a novel, *The Devil Takes a Holiday*. This is set in contemporary California, where Noyes once lived for a period of years, where Lucius Balliol (i.e. Son of Belial), an international financier representing the Prince of Darkness, finds so much of his work already done for him that he is in danger of being unemployed. The novel is a not unskilful blend of allegory and realism.

Two or three minor poets are worth mentioning. Not so long ago D. J. Enright, who is sometimes called "a Catholic Auden," brought out *Laughing Hyena*, and Bernard Bergonzi, whose work has appeared widely in periodicals and on the B.B.C., published his first book of poems. *Descartes and the Animals: Poems 1948-54*. Some of these echo such poets as Auden, Eliot and the Augustans, but the best of them are individual; some are experiments in prosody—as is "Postcard from Tossa," probably the best poem in the book.

Of course Roy Campbell far outranks these two poets, though he has not published much new work recently. Like Roy Campbell, F. T. Prince has published translations of poems of St. John of the Cross (in *The Month*). Prince's latest volume, *Soldiers Bathing and Other Poems*, written in the intellectualistic tradition of the metaphysicals did not live up to the expectations critics based on his earlier book, except for the notable title poem which has often been printed in anthologies.

Almost unknown in America but ranking almost with Edith Sitwell is David Jones, hard to classify as a poet or a prose writer. Of Welsh extraction, he was converted in 1921, learned engraving under Eric Gill, and later turned to painting. His pictures are in many private and public collections and he has entered works in the Venice Biennial. In 1954-55 a Retrospective Exhibition was held by the Arts Council at various centers in Wales, in Edinburgh, and at the Tate.

His first book, *In Parenthesis*, awarded the Hawthornden Prize in 1938, was an epic of war and one of the most remarkable literary achievements of our time. At one bound the author won a top place in the Catholic Literary revival. However, the book was appreciated by only an avant garde.

Then in 1954 came his *The Anathemata*, one of the most challenging Catholic contributions to literature since Hopkins. It is not a sequel to *In Parenthesis* but an equally original work by a wholly unclassifiable author. Like its prede-

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cessor, it is a testimony, and also a kind of testament, an inventory of what the author has inherited, what he has acquired, what he has to bequeath.

It was awarded The Russell Loines Award for Poetry by the National Institute of Arts and Letters in New York—a prize established in 1931 and given on only six occasions. But *The Anathemata*, an extremely difficult tapestry of allusions and themes, is known by very few.

More widely known are his pictures which have been the subject of a separate brochure in "The Penguin Modern Painters" series. Many of them are hauntingly parallel to his books, but as a writer he has failed to gain general recognition. He is a pioneer and will in the future probably be one of the most important influences on young Catholic writers in England.

Another top-ranking artist is Graham Sutherland, who, however, has not written any books. His own painting "leads from the later Turner,—not to Monet, but to Picasso" (as Edward Sackville-West, that sensitive Catholic music and art critic, notable for his recent *Record Guide*, has put it). Among his religious pictures have been "Christ Carrying the Cross," "Crucifixion," and "Deposition," and Sackville-West sees in all his paintings his profound sense of Original Sin.

Sir William Rothenstein continues to head the Tate, and among the leading art critics is John Pope-Hennessy who recently published two books, *Italian Gothic Sculpture* and *Fra Angelico*.

**I**N THE field of the novel the two giants are, of course, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh. Says P. H. Newby in a recent British Council pamphlet entitled "The Novel 1945-50": "Many people of good judgment, if asked who is the leading English novelist now writing, would give Greene's name."

All know that Greene distinguishes carefully between his most serious books and his "entertainments." Fewer know that Greene also writes children's books. Not long ago he published *The Little Steamroller*. The hero of the story, with his driver, is involved in a story of smuggling. The dialog, as always, is nervous and contemporary and the action moves fast.

Recently he brought out also one of his "entertainments" (in his dedicatory note he refers to it as a "frivolity") *Loser Takes All*, a novelette set at Monte Carlo and dealing with two passions—that of a honeymoon and that of gambling. Critics did not take the book very seriously though all appreciated its skilful construction.

At the Phoenix Theatre *The Power and the Glory* (or *Labyrinthine Ways*) was presented, with a remarkable *décor* for five different scenes helping to create the Mexican atmosphere and setting.

*The Tablet* remarked that the story came across the footlights with a tremendous impact and succeeded in conveying the rare quality of the novel, the

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sense of degraded society, and of the kind of people among whom the Church has to continue her work.

The actor Paul Scofield sustained the very arduous part of the haunted priest, conveying both his human weaknesses, his exhaustion of spirit, natural fearfulness, and, at the same time, the inner strength which kept him faithful to his priesthood and made him turn his back on flight and face the risk and then the certainty of capture. He did this to take the Sacraments to those who sent for him, though they would not accept his dangerous ministrations. An essential part of the Catholic truth was seldom more eloquently or powerfully portrayed—the distinction the Church has always made between the priestly office and the man entrusted with it.

Unfortunately because of other commitments the Phoenix could run it for only eight weeks.

But the real news of Greene was his new novel, his first since 1951, *The Quiet American*, which in England was a Book Society Choice and Daily Mail Book of the Month. Unlike his recent *Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair* its theme is not explicitly theological, though it is implied. Fowler, an English newspaper correspondent, when he describes Alden Pyle, the American—"I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused" brings the new book into the stream of all Greene's major novels.

Fowler represents the relatively complex and mature European mind while Pyle is loaded with naïve ideologies. *The Month* saw in the creation of Fowler a flaw, that of despair: the characteristics are true of Fleet Street, the novel truer of a French intellectual. The journalist has seen many wars and has lived in an atmosphere of rumors, has sinned and does not know how to repent; in his despair he hints a vision of truth, attacking, on his way, the evil illusions of an innocent whom he shrewishly envies and reasonably fears. Like Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* and Bendis in *The End of the Affair*, Fowler seeks real love.

There has been some controversy in reviews as to whether the novel may be called a religious one. One critic, for instance, has contended that Greene's series of novels which took Catholicism as their theme, beginning with *Brighton Rock* and finishing with *The End of the Affair*, has given place to a new series, starting with *The Quiet American* where religion plays little or no part, thus perhaps falsifying one of the critics who wrote of *The End of the Affair* that this was likely to be his last novel that did not demand a theologian to review it.

On the other hand, Rex Warner, writing in *The London Magazine*, holds that Greene is in fact a moral writer and should be judged as such, and that he is also a religious writer. To Rex Warner it seems hard to hold that in *The Quiet American* religion plays little or no part though it is true that the particular problems of a Roman Catholic conscience do not form part of the story. He

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finds in the story the pity for the sinner which has been so frequent in Greene's major novels.

At the same time, he holds that *The Quiet American* is one of the best novels that Greene has written, a work of very great technical accomplishment, told with such skill that the effect is one of simplicity, with a spare, cool style that can rise to beauty and can be narrowed to poignancy. Taking into consideration the fact that the setting is that of modern warfare, he contends that nothing so moving and so controlled has been written on the subject since Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.

It is rumored that Greene is at present writing a biography of his kinsman, Robert Louis Stevenson.

WAUGH'S latest novel, *Officers and Gentlemen*, also has a less explicit religious theme than its predecessor, *Arms and the Man*—where it was very slight—and much less than *Brideshead Revisited*. Yet *Officers and Gentlemen* is a deeply serious work in the sense that *Vile Bodies* or *Decline and Fall* were not.

*Officers and Gentlemen* deals with the "old school tie" attitude that the army should be a kind of proper London club. One of its virtues is that instead of simplifying this theme it deals with its intricate complexities.

It completes and complements Waugh's previous novel of World War II, though it is independent in itself. The earlier book had dealt with the first year of the war, and the new novel takes up the period of the Russo-German alliance.

In *Men at Arms* Guy Crouchback, the main character in both war books, a melancholy Catholic of that nearly extinct species, "the gentleman," had joined with halberdiers. Disillusioned about his private life, he hoped to find in war a personal revitalization. In *Officers and Gentleman* he joins the Commandos as an intelligence officer. The group is made up of volunteers from various units, wearing a variety of uniforms and following a multitude of conflicting regimental customs. Both novels are the sad story of Guy's progressive ennui and dissatisfaction.

The new story opens with his training in Scotland on the estates of a mad Scottish laird, takes him to Africa and the Middle East, to occupied France, to the British withdrawal from Crete, and finally back to London where, to complete the circle, he is about to rejoin the halberdiers.

Though the other characters are sharply subordinated to Guy in this novel, the gallery of secondary figures is a rich one. Their very names indicate a tendency toward the caricature for which Waugh is famous. We meet Col. Grace-Groundling-Marchpole, Brigadier Ritchie-Hook, Maj. Hound, Maj. Gen. Whale, Tommy Blackhouse, Jumbo the old halberdier, Ivor Claire, Julia Stitch

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(she "had many interests but only one interest at a time" and was famous for her parties), Corp-Maj. Ludovic, "suspected of writing poetry."

But above all we meet a true bounder, McTavish, nicknamed "Trimmer," because he had been a hairdresser and fancies himself a ladies' man and vulgarly tries to force himself on Guy's former wife, Virginia. He becomes an officer but never a gentleman.

A pusillanimous cad, by a fluke he becomes a hero, and the "Daily Beast" (Waugh's term for the press), calling him "the demon barber," takes up his cause as demonstrating that the real heroes are those who never saw an old school tie and hence are a "boost to civilian morale and Anglo-American friendship."

The barb of satire is very sharp here, as it is also when Guy's father opens a food package from American friends.

Next [was] a very heavy little tin labeled "Brisco—A Must in Every Home." There was no indication of its function. Soap? Concentrated fuel? Rat poison? Boot polish? . . . Next a larger tin named "yum-crunch." This must be edible for it bore the portrait of an obese and badly brought up little girl waving a spoon and fairly bawling for the stuff.

This is the gay and cruel Waugh whom his faithful readers will at once recognize, but beneath it all for Guy Crouchback is the realization that while some cads are fake heroes, many wearing the old school tie are hardly gentlemen. He knows, to his discomfort, that we live in an "ambiguous world where priests were spies and gallant friends proved traitors and his country was led blundering into dishonor."

There have been many war novels, but perhaps no other has conveyed as well the sense of isolation and stagnation felt by the individual, the sense of the meaninglessness of ignorant armies struggling by night, and above all of the boredom of the battlefield. To write of boredom without being boring is perhaps the greatest demonstration of its author's skill.

The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer held that the standard of Waugh's dialogue and description is as high as ever, his prose just as delightful and dexterous, and that he shows a deepening capacity for fusing experience and entertainment.

There have also been two other briefer books by Waugh: one, *Holy Places*, forty pages long, reminiscent of some of the materials which went into *Helena*, is said to be "but an outline of a series of books Waugh had meant to write about the long, intricate, intimate relations," between England and the shrines of the Holy Land.

The other was a delightful *jeu d'esprit*, *Love Among the Ruins*, a satire on

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the welfare state, projected into a future where Christianity itself has become a mere memory.

Earlier this year the B.B.C. broadcasted an adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*. In reporting the program the *Tablet* felt that Robert Eddison surprisingly missed some of the *jouissance* of Sebastian's Arcadian heyday, and was more authentic when he was in decline in Tangiers; and Hugh Burden made Charles Ryder rather cold. Rather, it was the great house itself which emerged most vividly, with its motif of lazy rooks; and after the house, it was Bridehead the man who most clearly took shape. David Markham exactly conveyed his monolithic quality, and admirably played the difficult scene where he announces his engagement. But, said *The Tablet*, somehow the Catholic "thing" escaped, and only the gentle hesitant voice of Father Mowbray carried conviction.

There were other notable episodes in Waugh's life recently. One was a dinner talk for the Newman Society where he pessimistically stated, "Our whole literary world is sinking into black disaster. I am sure that those who live for the next thirty years will see the art of literature dying." As an illustration of the slow death of literature he pointed to the absence of young talent.

Catholic writers, he suggested, don't devote themselves seriously to writing because, "The Christian writer knows that five minutes after his death it will not matter to him in the least whether his books are a success or not. So he is naturally lazy." He also made an interesting comment to the effect that non-Catholics have no plots left for their books: "In the old days a lot depended on the couple getting married, but today, if the marriage is going to last perhaps only six weeks, the whole book comes to nothing."

Waugh has also been trying to teach manners to those who attempt to make pilgrimages to his home in Gloucestershire where his gate bears a sign, "No Admittance on Business." There has been a very spirited interchange of articles and letters in the *Daily Express* and *Spectator* over an attempted expedition by Nancy Spain, literary editor for the Beaverbrook press, and Lord Noel-Buxton. The outrageous behaviour of Waugh's callers was apparently countered by even more outrageous behaviour on the part of Waugh himself, and the scenes became like chapters from one of his own earlier novels.

A novelist of an older generation, Sheila Kaye-Smith, not long ago published a kind of guide of the countryside she knew so well, *The Weald of Sussex*, and a novel set in the Kent-Sussex world that was supremely hers, *The View from the Parsonage*. This is a chatty memoir of a Sussex rector with a suspicion of things Roman. His two daughters, brought up by him in the religion of decorous behaviour, clash violently with his rigid rationalism and react against their upbringing, one flouting her father by interest in "psychic manifestations," the other by conversion to Catholicism.

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In January of this year unexpectedly the paper announced the death of Sheila Kaye-Smith, who in private life was Mrs. Theodore Penrose-Fry, in her home in Sussex at the age of sixty-eight. The *Times* carried a full column obituary.

She had as genuine and intimate a feeling for her county—Sussex—its landscape, people, crafts, history—as any of the “regional” novelists among her contemporaries had for theirs, and probably as sound a knowledge of farming ways. Robust in feeling rather than in any conventional sense earthy, the best of her books had a quietly challenging veracity and were done with controlled feminine vigor and sincere warmth of personal sentiment. Many of the earlier books received, unfortunately, somewhat extravagant praise and were made the subject of far-fetched critical comparison, so that their real virtues were apt to be obscured. Further, I think, the central critical problem when one surveys her entire writing career—and she had a slightly overfluent pen—is to ask whether as the years passed she really grew and developed as a novelist. The answer, I fear, is in the negative. Many of the early novels are at least the equal of her later ones and she had a tendency to repeat herself.

Availing herself for the most part of simple materials and turning again and again to the theme of innocence trapped by passion, Sheila Kaye-Smith brought off an effect of tragedy with admirable directness and unsentimental clarity. The high mood of imaginative simplicity did not last, however; though she retained both skill and sympathy her tragic material in time became somewhat threadbare and was overlaid by more conventional stuff. She continued now and then to reproduce something of her old form—*Susan Spray*, for instance, published in 1931, was on only slightly lower a level than *Joanna Godden*, to the theme of which, indeed, it bore some resemblance—but her later fiction lacks the truth and the power of her best work.

Her first novel appeared in 1908. In 1916 *Sussex Gorse* attracted and deserved notice. The portrait of a farmer of stubborn and formidable temperament, covering the changes in farming methods and the law of land tenure during the nineteenth century, this was a telling feat of imaginative realism, giving admirable promise for the future.

In *Tamarisk Town* (1919), a growing preoccupation with matters of religious belief became apparent and was still more marked in *Green Apple Harvest* which appeared in the following year and which Sheila Kaye-Smith herself was afterwards inclined to think the best of her novels.

A year later still came *Joanna Godden*, a superior book which, however, did not have with the reading public a wide success. This came with a much less satisfactory book, *The End of the House of Alard* (1923) in which the picture of the English squirearchy in decay was coupled with the expression of the

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author's social and economic opinions, and in her next novel, *The George and Crown* (1925), she was back in her best form.

She continued to produce a new book almost every year, sometimes oftener. They varied in quality and tended to show something of a decline in power; most of the later ones were, perhaps, in a more frankly popular vein than might be expected. But there was excellent work in *Shepards in Sackcloth* (1930) in which she reverted to a favorite theme, and in *Superstition Corner*, a story of Sussex in the days of the Armada, and *Gallybird*, both published in 1934.

*Tambourine, Trumpet and Drum* (1943) was an accomplished and readable enough specimen of her later fiction.

Though by far the most important part of her work consists in her novels, she wrote other volumes. She broke new ground in *Quartet in Heaven*, published in 1953, in which she studied the lives of four Catholics. Three of them have been canonized. The theme of the book is that "Grace follows Nature" and it may well be that here Sheila Kaye-Smith's insight has received its highest expression.

In 1929 both she and her husband announced their conversion. They lived in Sussex and there built a chapel dedicated to one of the saints about whom she had written.

In partnership with the novelist G. B. Stern she wrote in 1944 *Talking of Jane Austen* and recently G. B. Stern contributed the preface to a reprint of *Superstition Corner* which Regnery brought out in America.

G. B. STERN, also a convert, not long ago wrote an account of her own conversion entitled *All in Good Time*. She also recently published a novel, *Johnny Forsaken*. The theme is the core of spiritual pride in the central character, a middle-aged lawyer's clerk, whose principal interest in life has been the running of a flourishing dramatic society. It is written with her usual overflowing vitality.

Compton Mackenzie continues to pour out book after book after book in addition to radio broadcasts, historical studies, scripts—almost anything. He has a wide general public, but since some of his early novels like *Sinister Street* or *Carnival* and then twenty years ago the series, *The Four Winds of Love*, quality has been spread very thin in favor of quantity. A new book, *Thin Ice*, was announced for 1956.

Bruce Marshall, too, has been almost too prolific. To me the last important novel belongs to 1953 when *The Fair Bride* appeared with its theme, the spiritual and intellectual difficulties of a priest—the subject of a great many novels recently. The difficulty is that such men as Greene in England and Bernanos in France have treated that theme so much more powerfully.

1954 brought not only *Thoughts of My Cats* but also a novel *Only Fade*



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*Away*, the story of an army officer unjustly accused of cowardice. One of the deservedly minor characters is an unsympathetic portrait of a Dominican. Coincidence may seem too conveniently kind to the novelist's purpose, but the rapid humorous sketches revealed once more Bruce Marshall's journalistic flair.

*Girl in May*, 1956, is a minor work which combines, as one reviewer put it, his characteristic "blend of coy eroticism and cozy ecclesiasticism."

In the forefront of historical novelists is Alfred Duggan who has won very high respect in England and to a lesser degree, in America. Born in Argentina, partly of American descent, Alfred Duggan was brought to England at an early age and England has been his home ever since.

His reputation is due to five novels which reconstruct exciting and little-known episodes in the history of the Middle Ages: *Leopards and Lilies*, *Knight in Armor*, *The Conscience of the King*, *The Little Emperors*, and *The Lady for Ransom*.

With an accurate scholarship and a talent for historical reconstruction, he makes the reader see the Middle Ages through the eyes and with the attitudes of the people of his story. He combines a precise sense of period based on authentic scholarship with the ability to interest and entertain his readers. Further, there is seldom anything sentimental in his treatment, which brings out even the coarseness and brutality of the era and the complexity of the motives involved.

In 1952 he published a short introductory biography, *Thomas Becket of Canterbury*. Now, in *God and My Right* (in U.S. entitled *My Life for My Sheep*) he has returned to the subject of Becket and the King and has written an absorbing full-length novel around one of the most celebrated dramas in English history.

The clash of spiritual and temporal power rings through the twelfth century. Duggan brings this endless debate to life in a novel of interesting characterization, masterly detail and subtle humor and with fresh and vivid descriptions of riding and hawking and the open air. However, *God and My Right*, which evokes comparison with T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, may not be his best novel to date.

An important young writer who in his last two books has turned for a time from the novel is the widely admired Aubrey Mennen. He had written the novels, *The Backward Bride*, *The Stumbling Block*, and *The Prevalence of Witches*, known for their wit and brilliance. To this gallery of novels he added not long ago another, *The Duke of Gallodoro*, the story of an eccentric English "Fourteenth Duke" in Italy in his usual comical even farcical, light-hearted and mocking manner.

But recently he published *The Ramayana Retold* in which he rewrites the famous Hindu epic in modern prose and in the form he imagined it to have

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been originally. The result was a completely charming mixture of humor and heroics which revealed the shrewd insight and satirical wit with which the author rewarded his readers in previous books.

More recently he wrote *Dead Man in the Silver Market*, subtitled "An Autobiographical Essay on National Prides," a series of loosely connected essays. The son of an Irish mother and of a Hindu father, educated in England and now living in Italy, Mennen was particularly well equipped to deal with his subject: he has three or four native lands.

The theme is, of course, only indirectly religious, for he is more concerned with the false religion of national pride which he tries to distinguish from true patriotism. There is a good deal of spite for baiting of the English in it, for British imperialism is perhaps his chief target. He writes in short casual sentences and depends on understatement for his effects. There is much social comedy which at times become acidly bitter. Mennen has been called a "wonderfully witty and amazingly perceptive talent."

Another author who as present has turned away from the novel and short story (*Character and Situation*, etc.) is Christopher Sykes whose volume of biographical studies, *Four Studies in Loyalty*, was recently followed by *Two Studies in Virtue*. This later volume rescues from oblivion a not very eminent Victorian, Richard Waldo Sibthorp, the most vacillating of all the tractarians, who five times changed his religious allegiance. The study sympathetically suggests the complex plight of the Anglican caught between Rome and Canterbury. The second loyalty is a history of Zionism since 1917, enriched by dependence on the family papers of his father, Sir Mark Sykes. It is a study in disillusionment. Christopher Sykes in both studies succeeds by a sympathetic realization of the complexities and subtleties of those who do not share his faith.

Antonia White is already well known for her *Frost in May*, *The Lost Traveller*, and *The Sugar House* all of which deal with the life of Clara Batchelor. Now she has brought out a further volume, *Beyond the Glass*.

Clara has been married to an impotent husband and being Catholics they can do nothing but wait through the long-drawn process of a decree of nullity from Rome. During this waiting period she falls in love idyllically with a young man who possesses every perfection. The long strain of waiting, however, proves too much, and Clara's emotional exaltation and heightened perception, which she though were the result of love and happiness, are revealed as the early manic states of insanity. The rest of the novel takes her to a mental hospital and it ends with her release and a new life to be faced.

Although many of the reviewers criticized the sections preceding Clara's days in the sanitarium, all were agreed on the convincing skill with which Antonia White dealt with Clara's deranged mind and its gradual recovery. In this

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they held she was brilliantly successful—John Davenport in *The Observer*, for instance, saying, "the asylum scenes are shockingly well done."

Antonia White also recently published a volume of short stories, *Strangers*, consisting of seven studies concerned with the inner nature of men and women. Notable is "The Saint," which recaptures a convent-school atmosphere which Antonia White had treated so brilliantly in her first novel, *Frost in May*, and other stories deal with an hysterical wife, a woman in a madhouse, a neurotic spinster, and a rich woman of sentimental and pathological selfishness. These may not be happy stories, but they are the work of a mature artist.

To me one of the most interesting first novels of recent years is *The Key that Rusts*, by Isobel English, the pseudonym of the young wife of Neville Braybrooke, in which the novelist wishes to tell the story of a love affair between Mary Schwartz, a young girl, and Sam Errington, a middle-aged married man.

It is told by Sam's stepsister who watches the affair, not from the sidelines, but from the center. She acts as encourager, confidante, and finally as scapegoat.

Sam and Mary are set on outwitting with their love the forces of time and the world. They do not allow for the fact that "the key that opens is the key that rusts" (Auden). It is not Sam's disregarded wife who is their undoing, nor the moral pressure of society. If, at the end, they are stranger to each other than casual acquaintances, it is because of the flaw in their own rapacious love.

The greatest skill is in the sem-ironic point of view which with the whole story is presented.

Another interesting recent novel is Isobel Quigley's *The Eye of Heaven*, an uneven story of marital unfaithfulness notable for the care and skill with which complex states of mind are described.

Another significant recent novel is *The Singular Hope* by Elizabeth Sewell, an account of the emotional development and difficult adolescence of a physically deformed girl of fifteen in the unsympathetic environment of a school for retarded children. It is a story of spiritual victory won against great odds, and Miss Sewell succeeds in conveying the despairing feeling of isolation both from the other children and from the outside world, though some of the dialog is reportorial and flat.

More distinguished as historian (he this year published *Scotland Under Charles I*) than novelist, David Mathew has completed his trilogy (*The Manoga on the Mango Tree* and *In Vallombrosa* already appeared) with *The Prince of Wales's Feathers*. Here he gives us a novel—though it is innocent of plot—of low life in a seaport town. Pubs, cafes and lodging houses are the background for the story he writes around its rootless population. The shifting world of temporary loyalties is his theme.

He has a detached and almost ironic—and yet generous—attitude toward his characters and their follies, and the style is controlled and spare.

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*Up the Green River* by Thomas Gilby tells the story of a priest who takes a party of his parishioners from a mid-Victorian industrial town to make a new life in South America. There are far too many characters and they participate in a too elaborate plot.

Monica Dickens, frequently on the English best seller lists, has written *The Winds of Heaven*, the story of a widow who has seemingly outlived her usefulness to her three daughters. It is a very slight story with good characterization.

Twelve new short stories by Viola Meynell, *Louise and Other Stories*, are sketches, studies in irony or sensibility with theme rather than plot.

Another popular writer, Dorothy Mackinder, brought out *Summer like a Stranger* which has as a background county society in Victorian England.

TURNING from fiction to other literary genres, one notices the vast void created by the death of Belloc. Obituaries and memorial articles and essays in revaluation appeared in many of the English newspaper and periodicals. *The Tablet*, for instance, devoted an entire issue to essays on various aspects of his writings, and reprints and collections of his works have been appearing. The *Times Literary Supplement* devoted its leading front page article to a review of *Sonnets and Verse of Hilaire Belloc*, the complete edition of his poetry, and entitled it "The European Mind: Hilaire Belloc's Thought and Writings." Published also was *One Thing and Another: A Miscellany from His Uncollected Works* selected by Patrick Cahill. Possibly these signs point to the fulfillment of the couplet Belloc once wrote:

When I am dead, I hope it may be said  
His sins were scarlet, but his books were read.

Only time, can, of course, sift the grain from the chaff of Belloc's writings and establish his final reputation, but already one short study, *Hilaire Belloc: A Memoir*, by J. B. Morton, has appeared. It is a personal portrait of Belloc seen through the eyes of a hero-worshipping friend. It is therefore strong in appreciation and weak in critical evaluation.

Robert Speaight is now busily working at the Belloc papers and preparing the definitive biography.

In the field of more strictly defined religious literature, Alan Pryce-Jones has called Monsignor Ronald Knox's translations of the Bible, "Perhaps the most enduring of religious literature produced during the last few years." Recently with some changes—mostly minor—his three volumes have been reprinted as one.

He has also recently published two other books: one, *A Retreat for Lay People*, twenty-four discourses in masterful prose refreshingly free from theological technicalities and from clerical clichés, the other *Off the Record*, some

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fifty letters sent at unstated periods to correspondents about personal, political, biblical, dogmatic, philosophic—and even aesthetic—matters. The volume volume is weakened by the fact that only Knox's side of the correspondence is presented.

E. I. Watkin, always an interestingly eclectic philosopher and critic, has added *Poets and Mystics* to a field controversial ever since the suggestions of Henri Brémond.

Philip Caraman has followed *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*, well received a few years ago, with *An Autobiography from the Jesuit Underground*. This is a translation and edition of a sixteenth century account by William Weston of his missionary work in England after he was landed secretly on the coast and took shelter with Catholic families. Eventually he was put in the Tower of London and finally released and exiled after the death of Queen Elizabeth. There are extensive notes, letters, and appendices.

In his introduction to the book, Waugh has remarked: "One by one the lives of the Catholics are being disinterred from scholarly and sectarian works and presented to the general public."

As editor of *The Month* Philip Caraman has also edited *Saints and Ourselves*, a series on favorite saints by such Catholic writers as Antonia White, J. B. Morton, Evelyn Waugh, T. S. Gregory, Edward Sackville-West, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and Robert Speaight.

The last-named has also recently brought out three books, *William Pohl and the Elizabethan Revival*, *George Eliot*, and, most important, *Nature in Shakespearean Tragedy*. His general thesis in this book is that when one strips a few of the outward trappings from an Elizabethan he finds underneath them a man of the Middle Ages. Speaight uses Shakespeare's treatment of the ideas of nature and grace as a clue to the moral structure of six of the greater plays, but he does not ride this to death. He brings his whole sensibility as well as his sound theological knowledge to the consideration of the plays.

Another volume in the same field is Derek Traversi's *Shakespeare: The Last Phase*. Vividly he brings out what might be called a Christian spirit that does, more definitely and consistently than any where else in Shakespeare, seem to inform these last plays. The critic holds that reconciliation takes place, in each play, "on a moral basis enriched by subjection to suffering."

Viola Meynell's *Francis Thompson and Wilfred Meynell: A Memoir* is an important book for all admirers of Thompson's poetry, for the death of her father has allowed Viola Meynell to delve into the large collection of letters which had been stored away in his library at Greatham and thus throw new light on Thompson's character and his relations with Alice Meynell and Coventry Patmore.

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The most recent volume by Bernard Wall is a study of one of the leading Catholic writers of Italy, *Alessandro Manzoni*.

Sir Shane Leslie, whose *Life and Labours of Cardinal Manning* had been written to refute Purcell's *Life*, has been rewritten as a shorter study. His *Cardinal Gasquet* recently reopened an evaluation of that scholar. It was not, of course, surprising that Gasquet made mistakes when one considers that he was breaking so much new ground and destroying so much myth. What has worried his admirers was that he did not correct them in later editions and that he clung obstinately to theories when they had been definitely disproved. Sir Shane's style is epigrammatic, gay, almost impish.

James Broderick's *Saint Francis Xavier* will soon be followed by his *St. Ignatius: The Pilgrim Years*, an account of the period from his birth to the founding of the Jesuits.

Other interesting forthcoming biographical-critical studies are Christopher Devlin's *Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr*, which is said to contain much new material and A. Dwight Culler's *The Imperial Intellect*, an interpretation of Newman's life in the light of his educational philosophy.

Lord and Lady Pakenham have produced books recently. The first wrote the story of his conversion, *Born to Believe*, which has little that is profound about it. Lady Pakenham edited *Catholic Approaches*, an uneven volume to which various writers have contributed. The most outstanding chapter is by David Jones on art. The author sees that the sacramental sign that lies at the heart of Christianity is the key to much more than ritual. "There is a recalling, a re-presenting again, anaphora, anamnesis." All art re-presents, and the central points of Catholic truth—that redemption is renewed, made present yet again is the continuing work of Christ which the Church exists to make available to men—is stated by David Jones, the author of *The Anathemata*, with a precision, and yet with an awareness of the infinite overtones so tremendous an idea must impose, which recall his own paintings. Because of his health Christopher Dawson has been less active than ordinarily. Successful are the second and third volumes of Philip Hughes' *The Reformation in England. Acton on History* by Lionel Kochan misunderstands Acton's character and makes nonsense out of his strongest convictions.

Among travel and guide books has been Sir Arnold Lunn's *Zermatt and the Valais*, for which no writer could have been better qualified for this blend of a tourist's guide and a personal travel book.

Ranking high in travel literature is *The Golden Honeycomb* in which Vincent Cronin, delving into legend and antiquities, deals with Sicily, its history and its arts. The "quest" is for the golden honeycomb which Daedalus is said to have made as a grateful *ex voto* to the Aphrodite of Erike. The book is one

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of the most sensitively written in its genre and has won for young Vincent Cronin an important place in English letters.

His reputation has been further bolstered by his *The Wise Man from the West*, the story of an Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, who entered late in the sixteenth century the sealed empire of China. At that time he was the only European in the whole of China. He learned its classical language, its modes of thought, its psychological idiom, and the complex stylized etiquette of its social life. He was indeed a pioneer in cultural relations as well as one of the greatest of missionaries. Cronin, writing with an intense restrained vigor, succeeds in communicating his sense of wonder.

From his column "Talking at Random" in *The Tablet*, the editor of the magazine, Douglas Woodruff, has collected a volume entitled *Walrus Talk* in which he ranges into almost every field wisely and wittily.

Finally, a newcomer among the periodicals is *The Heritage Magazine*, specifically devoted to the monuments and places of historical interest connected with Catholicism in England. The magazine carries many photographs and is handsome in format. So carefully have the editors wished to associate the periodical with the contributions of Catholicism to England that they have even chosen as the typeface that designed in 1495 for Cardinal Bembo.

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# Communication and Communion In Melville

BY G. A. KNOX

IN A TIME when many Americans are returning to Christianity for the solution of the enigmas and paradoxes of modern life (if increased church attendance is a valid evidence), Melville's fiction has become increasingly interesting. But for those who return to Christianity for psycho-therapy or various kinds of solace and balm to soothe their anxieties into an easy grace, Melville's works will also offer the proper shock. They face up to the dilemmas of Christianity in the social context; they show us the jagged way and the severe perspectives earned by a mature mind and conscience. Probably the non-specialist is better acquainted with *Moby Dick*, or with some aspect of it, than with some of the equally fine though less panoramic works. One knows something of the hero, Captain Ahab, that great, flawed, maimed, God-like but demonically obsessed man. One sees in him the eternal problem of the man who would usurp the prerogatives of God. One sees the problem of the search for identity and the confusing and shifting aspects of self-hood. But these are only easy generalizations about this great multi-level work, which to explore here would be impossible.

Yet, the problem, however limited, of communion and communication which I wish to point out in *Bartleby the Scrivener* requires some buttressing and shoring up from other and larger works. I might do this briefly by referring momentarily to *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*, where we confront the paradoxes of command as we do in *Moby Dick*, but also entwined with other riddles such as the perception-judgment crux and the relation of the finite to the absolute as the corollary problems of sacrifice and communion. This may at first seem incoherent, but a few statements should bring the issues to focus.

In *Benito Cereno*, rich with monastic and ecclesiastical implications, we follow Captain Amasa Delano's obtuse perceptions as he tries to penetrate the mysterious and ambiguous appearances aboard the *San Dominick*. He tries to pierce the mystery and make a judgment about it. As he seeks evidence first in support of one hypothesis and then in support of another about the strange situation, we soon discover through his misunderstood perceptions the lurking shapes of doubt. We sense dark possibilities, possibilities that evil is in control and finally that it may even have triumphed. Babo (the dark) may have become in death the real leader whom Benito follows, for in the manner



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of his defeat he has certainly followed Aranda whose skeleton decorates the prow of the ship.

The color symbolism transcends any racial meanings except insofar as Melville took pains to make the Negro a *man* equally susceptible to and representative of evil and to explode the noble savage myth. Doing so, he makes evil a permanent presence in nature and perhaps one which may even dominate good. Peripherally, then, God's benevolence and power may appear to be questioned. In one perspective we see (because Captain Delano's piety does not permit him to see it) that God not only may allow man the means of his own destruction, but that God himself may become helpless once the power of evil has gained dominance over his human agents through acts of their own folly. Whatever the final solution, the struggle between dark and light is primary.

Briefly, this paradox arises when through flashback Delano, aboard the Spanish ship, learns that out of Christian charity Benito and Don Aranda allowed the slaves to be free above deck instead of remaining chained below. What is the meaning of this? Is Melville saying that we cannot know the absolute, that our finite acts always become at best only partially right? Obviously, allowing the blacks to move freely above deck was an error in judgment. Delano's pious and benevolent insistence on staying aboard the San Dominick analogously betrays command responsibilities. The white bone symbolism and the shading between grays and black carries this theme, command and its loss being constantly communicated to us through such imagery as the flayed skeleton of Aranda. Yet Delano never realizes the "meaning" of all this, and therefore the problem is a breakdown in communication.

Benito would communicate his dreadful peril to Delano but is prevented by the ominous, hovering presence of the black Babo and by Delano's mental density. Delano cannot see the truth because he is constantly deceived by his perceptions. Preformed notions inhibit his making the proper inferences. Everyone aboard is relatively blind or flawed. This is symbolized in various ways, particularly in the tarred-over lamps and in the cracked bell. The blacks hold the whites captives so that the white may lead them to freedom. The blacks do not know how to navigate the ship. The whites are in bondage because of a weakness in command. And Delano is totally confused about black and white, master and servant, right and wrong, illusion and reality.

**I**N *BILLY BUDD*, however, the problem of leadership is more clearly associated with absolutes: command responsibility, sacrifice, communication. Captain ("Starry") Vere, the kindly but stern commander of a naval vessel in time of war; Claggart the innately evil and insidious master-at-arms; and Billy Budd, the Christ-like boy of innocence and beauty—these are the actors in a similar

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drama. After Vere influences the court martial to sentence Billy to death, the threat of mutiny in the fleet being an excuse, we must ask whether this sacrifice of Billy to the forms of military justice is the kind of expedience and compromise which Melville recommends when we are faced with Christian absolutes clashing with the absolutes of martial and civil legality. Or is Billy's sacrifice Melville's bitter testimony that the Christ-figure must unfortunately be sacrificed to keep order aboard a man-of-war-world? In the end then Billy's death can either mean Melville's sacrifice of the Christian absolute to practical exigencies, or his condemnation of the apparently absolute forms of temporal law.

Possible parodies on communion and communication through sacrifice are thematic in these works. Billy's speech impediment prevents his talking at a time of crisis. Benito's fear of death for himself and the remaining Spaniards prevents his communicating with Delano and meeting his Christian charity openly. Bartleby, we shall see, finally refuses to communicate because he is not accepted on his own grounds. Under stress, Billy answers the accusation that he fomented mutinous activity by trying to speak, but failing in this, he strikes out blindly and kills the satanic Claggart. Billy and Vere could never communicate adequately because of the vast breach between them. Hierarchically, Captain Vere lived in another realm, and Billy's dying words, "God Bless Captain Vere," are a kind of unconscious parallel to Christ's "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do," their positions, however, being reversed. Yet within the structure of the story, these words from Billy's lips can only convey Christian forgiveness, his passive acceptance of his role in sacrifice to force and evil. Between Claggart (evil incarnate, and therefore an absolute) and Billy (the unthinking innocence of prelapsarian Adam) there could be no communication. This meaning seems to lurk in the soup-spilling episode which causes Claggart's hatred to flare openly for the first time. Claggart perceives absolute purity in Billy, and this is an absolute which he judges impossible to accept or tolerate.

SO FAR, then, I wish only to point out similar concerns in these stories, emphases which may justify our finding a pervasive concern with communion and its corollary, communication, in *Bartleby*. For in *Bartleby* we are confronted with impassable barriers to union, symbolized both in material mass and in spiritual chasm. Here too through imperfect perceptions we find a man of one "kind" failing to communicate with a man of another kind. Here too Melville's characters must face the vexing compromise with absolutes by making judgments which momentarily jibe with the forms of society. In *Bartleby* as in *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd* someone must give himself up entirely. In *Benito Cereno* Aranda became a sacrificial victim to the demonic

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blacks, and Benito followed his leader in defeat. In *Billy Budd* Melville justified the sacrifice of Christ-like Billy to the forms of military law. In *Bartleby* Melville sacrifices the silent, passive scrivener to the Wall Street lawyer who is "an eminently safe man." Or he is saying that the lawyer's actions represent the best we humans can do when confronted by such absolutes as Bartleby. But what are these absolutes? In *Benito Cereno* Babo's absolute evil is associated with the tortures of the Inquisition, as in the shaving scene and the drawing of blood and the apparent love quarrel between the black and his master; in *Billy Budd* absolute evil is associated with Claggart's innate malignance and the impersonal yet inflexible forms of military justice; in *Bartleby* absolute evil is associated with the forms of commercial society and the fear of social pressures. In each case the whole being is appropriated by some other being. This is a perverse fund of communion, if you please. Or, again, perhaps it is possible in each to conceive the absolute good with which man cannot commune to be the "purity" of Christianity opposed to the weakness of our finite perceptions, to our inability to form satisfying judgments about the workings of Providence.

Although Melville's *Bartleby* undoubtedly projects his own frustrations as a writer, another possible plane of meaning opens itself to us. Bartleby may be the terrifying aspect of a literal acceptance of Christ's admonition that we be our brother's keeper, whereas the actions of the narrator may represent a kind of compromise through the conventions and the assumptions an intelligent person ordinarily lives by. If this is true, where does Melville stand in relation to these two positions? Analogy may open a perspective. In *Billy Budd* the handsome sailor stands opposite Claggart in much the same degree as the lawyer stands opposite Bartleby. The chief master-at-arms detects in Billy an inexplicable purity which maddens him. Similarly, Bartleby's demand that he be accepted totally on his own grounds maddens the lawyer who makes what most Christians would conceive as more than liberal overtures.

The failure of community in *Bartleby* may finally be Melville's way of asserting that Christ's admonitions are sometimes *literally* impossible and that the lawyer goes as far as is humanly feasible. Yet, Melville may be pessimistic in a more substantial sense, saying that to be a Christian demands just this kind of sacrifice of our "assumptions." To enforce this he would then sacrifice Bartleby to the same ironic ambivalence to which he submits Billy Budd. Is *Billy Budd* Melville's assertion that Christ and Billy must be sacrificed in order that the business of the world roll smoothly on? Or, is it that Melville bitterly condemns the business of the world that necessitates such crucifixion? These questions have been asked and partially answered. But the fact is that Billy was crucified to the assumptions of Starry Vere and the "forms" of military

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justice. And *Bartleby* was crucified to the "assumptions" of the Wall Street lawyer, humanistic as they appear.

IF WE carry the matter of communication breakdown to a theological dimension we find a failure of The Word. Thus: Bartleby's refusal to eat is an acknowledgement that communion has failed because his employer has refused to accept him and to penetrate the barriers of "common usage and common sense" that girt them round like the stone chasms of the Wall Street offices. Common sense tells us that it is not possible to turn the other cheek. We work out substitutes. Common sense tells us that it is not possible to be our brother's keeper, especially a brother of Bartleby's kind. And yet, in spite of his spasmodic exertions of the will and excursions into casuistry, the narrator realizes that "a bond of common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam." Thereafter he projects his own inability to accept into Bartleby's "innate and incurable disorder," just as Claggart passed off his malignance by exploiting Billy's congenital speech disability.

Communion is thwarted partly because the narrator opens himself only through a charity-supper, à la dole, kind of gesture, instead of an all-out faith in *Agape*. Bartleby is an irritating but powerful presence, a tantalizing and mysterious assertion-in-passivity. If he is in any way Christ-like, Melville tells us that he is an incongruity and anachronism: "like the last column of some ruined temple . . . standing mute and solitary in the middle of the other-deserted room." And no amount of reading in Edwards and Priestly could make the lawyer's "doctrine of assumptions" convincing; i.e., could deny Bartleby's reality, could deny that all his troubles with the scrivener "had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom." What then is this "mysterious purpose" but the eternal presence of the Christ-like, unrealizable ideal?

But the lawyer sees Bartleby as an "incubus" perversely clinging to him until death in the "Tombs" of the "Halls of Justice." Having physically divided himself, however, from the scrivener, the impossibility of brotherhood becomes final. There in the small grassy clearing Bartleby lay down—in "The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass seed, dropped by birds, had sprung." His dinner is ready, but he won't eat, just as he had refused to "copy" any longer. The grub-man asks: "Won't he dine today, either? Or does he live without dining?" The implication seems perfectly clear: that spiritual communion or

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consubstantiality requires a common basis of understanding, a common medium to be shared.

"Lives without dining," said I, and closed the eyes.

"Eh!—He's asleep, ain't he?"

"With kings and counselors," murmured I.

By this time we should accept the symbolic overtones of communication, for Bartleby had been "a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration."

Here is a fine irony, an implication that the old faith is either defunct or subject to revolutionary re-appraisal. It is also an ironic comment on the descent and incarnation of Christ from the house of God, from the Headquarters of the Logos, so to speak; and, further, can we ignore the implication of the communication—communion-Word complex in: "Dead Letters! does it not sound like dead men?" Bartleby, and what he represents spiritually, is the dead letter, an ineffectual incarnation of the Word, rejected and unrealized. He is the futile envelope which unopened contained the pure and mysterious will. He, through his own absoluteness, is unreceived, undeciphered, and hence a meaningless vector. Melville's last ejaculation, as authorial intrusion, is universal enough to include the meaning of his artistic failure to reach an audience and the generic human incapability to establish community.

The narrator would have had literally to accept Christ's admonitions that we be our brother's keeper. "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" Whether Melville's works are the imaginations of man's relations to absolutes in the last days of the Puritan theocracy, a time when Puritan Christianity was losing, or had lost, its dynamic integrating force in New England (or American) culture; or whether they deal with eternally recurring paradoxes—they are still vital. If Christianity is again becoming a saving force it may be reborn in an ideal time. The forces of darkness and blind power were perhaps never stronger. Yet, in the words of R. P. Blackmur, "To see boundless good on the horizon, to see it without the limiting discipline of the conviction of evil, is in poetry as in politics the great stultifier of action."\*

\*R. P. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, 1952, p. 39.

# Péguy and Charity

BY ROBERT NUGENT

THE ESSENTIAL meaning of Péguy's *Holy Innocents* is the theme of confidence in God. Yet if the reader proceeds from the structure of the poem, the long passages of ideas expounded point by point, which is the same technique used in the earlier *Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc* and *The Porch of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*, he is made to see that there is also a call to an awareness of a past religious experience which Péguy was convinced lay dormant in the national conscience. He attempted to recreate such an awareness through the form of what is sometimes called a myth, an appeal to a necessary directive purpose in the national life. And once aroused by this retelling, an inner memory—for Péguy followed Bergson—would spring into a meaningful activity. From the elements of a heroic past, frequently the result of tragedy, together with his faith, Péguy construed a new ethic of action for France, one which he exemplified in his death on the Marne.

For Péguy's faith was essentially heroic. It contained much the same combination of self-analysis, decision, and—seemingly—heroics as was possessed by Polyeucte in the tragedy by Corneille, whom he admired. In *Victor-Marie Comte Hugo*, Péguy maintained that *Polyeucte* was a tragedy of *vertu* in the original sense of heroic and virile strength transformed into Christian self-sacrifice. And even though certain critics might have seen Corneille's tragedy in the humanistic light of an apology for the triumph of a humanitarian over an abstract concept of force, still the point remains that its definition of heroism is the full employment of whatever moral virtue lies in a person's character. In the *Holy Innocents*, the point was made that each one had as much love as he was capable of; this is discernible in the discourse concerning Joinville and Saint Louis. Joinville would prefer to have committed thirty mortal sins than to contract leprosy. Saint Louis would have preferred leprosy to a single mortal sin. Heroism consisted in the possibility of heroism, the summoning up of what there was in moral courage and moral worth.

For Péguy such heroism was the reason for action. Quite likely he had read into *Polyeucte* a solution similar to the dilemma in which he, Péguy, had found himself. Both Polyeucte (for whom the question was whether or not he could make his wife understand his choice and his stand) and Péguy (who experienced the same need of understanding from other Frenchmen) called upon a Christian morality in the sense of an ethic descending from above, from God. For Péguy, the crux of the problem was found in the Incarnation:

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Mais enfin il ne faut pas oublier  
Que mon fils avait commencé par cette singulière imitation  
de l'homme.  
Singulièrement fidèle.  
Qu'elle fut poussée jusqu'à l'identité parfaite.

If one criticized Polyeucte for his seeming willingness to hand over his wife to Sévère, there was no other possibility, if he wished to remain consistent. In like fashion, Péguy could, before his conversion, criticize Renan not for having denounced Christianity but for having failed in what he had set out to do: to replace Christian logic by a purely secular one.

Péguy then felt it necessary to re-establish heroism, which would eventually involve both the state and the individual in the necessary Christianizing of social obligations. This was his final answer to the materialistic trend of the nineteenth century and to the nihilism and search for the *néant* which characterized French thought in the nineties, a swelling of romantic pessimism. He cried out against the easy way. His moral attitude did not change with his conversion. It became deeper and more finely etched. And his famous remark that *mystique* becomes *politique* meant to Péguy that the structure of society remained to a great extent equated with the structure of private and emotive knowledge dependent upon the necessity of knowing God to be present.

Moreover, if one sought to efface the discerning ego, a problem of liberty was involved. Polyeucte, in his search for God, could remake his individuality. It was questionable, however, whether Péguy's character could allow too severe a denial of this distinctiveness of personal action, which could explain why he delayed the moment of his conversion until 1909. The answer to the dilemma was apparent in the theological virtue of hope, which for Péguy remained a homely and daily one. Much as he used the dialogue form closest to the tropes of the medieval church, he tried also to impart simply and directly the feeling of medieval faith and practice. From this abandoning of one's self to hope came an individual freedom. In many respects Péguy's mind had a Hebraic cast, the call to order of the Old Testament prophets. And in such a revision of ethical values Péguy maintained his right to choose what he was convinced was the distinction between right and wrong, much as Corneille, in a *Discours*, in a kind of moral pragmatism, was able to admire Cleopatra's *grandeur d'âme*. What one could describe as moral determinism in Péguy played a role of catharsis as in tragedy.

PÉGUY rejected the romantic hero, the long-suffering victim of society. He never felt himself to be so. Rather he was convinced that society was worth saving, that it was, in effect, the company of the faithful, and therefore had in it the merit of redemption. He tried to build up a Christian humanitarian state for those who wished to *se construire* and not *se défaire*. And as

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Corneille in *Polyeucte* had tried to present a total fusion of various aspects of social ethics so Péguy made an apology for a similar position in the *Holy Innocents*. The motivating force of the poem, the construction of heroics, lay in the apotheosis of hope, the second of the virtues.

Une naissance d'espérance.

Une parole naissante.

Un rameau et un germe et un bourgeon et une feuille  
et une fleur et un fruit de parole.

Une semence, un naissement de prière.

Un verbe entre les verbes.

The central actor in the drama, Joan of Arc, obviously did not result from the interplay of scientific determinism and the economic condition described in a nineteenth-century realistic novel. For Péguy the only drama was that of the Christian giving himself to God; there was only one possibility of action, that of the Christian life. Nor was it with Péguy the single preoccupation of the decay of society that needed bolstering, that must have an explanation for its faults and purposes. In Corneille *honneur, gloire, grand coeur* were the real motivating powers; they were not signs of reaction against a society that was decadent but rather a defense of a society which built for itself a greatness. Péguy's answer was also social: it found its fullest self-expression in socialism. When this became a political movement, its meaning for Péguy was destroyed.

For Péguy, grace was effective. He was not as concerned as St. Paul or St. Augustine with discussions of predestination, although he surely held, along with St. Augustine against Pelagius, that "the whole of man's activity is predestined by the presence or absence within him of God's grace." In Péguy we have the sense of man's dependence on God, the fact that the Divine will is working through man.

Comme leur liberté a été créée à l'image et à la  
ressemblance de ma liberté, dit Dieu,

Comme leur liberté est le reflet de ma liberté. . . .

In the form of the poem, the intervention of God, the virgin, the passages of meditation, Péguy attempted to lead us to understand the purpose of Divine will or something like Dostoevsky's preoccupation with the notion that God needs man to complete His work. That Péguy should use poetry rather than the essay made possible a more persuasive argument, comparable to the "inspired" romantic and humanitarian poetry of the later Hugo; in many respects Péguy's verse calls to mind the vehemence of the *Destinées*.

The elements of tragedy in the *Holy Innocents*—heroism, justification of actions, liberty through the Christian virtue of hope—came to their fullest perfection through grace, and they gained their greatest significance through sacrifice. The transcendence of individual acts in Péguy lay in the Christian



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call to grace and virtue. His answer was modified by his patriotism and his devotion to France. Much in his writing has the spirit of the medieval epics: God's intervention and the offering of knightly deeds as in the chansons. He loved France (he was a peasant from the Loire) for the possibility of good which was within her. He believed that he was one of those who had to go over and, in his own manner, ritualize the past of France through Joan of Arc. Whereas Proust captured personal time, Péguy captured national time, though both were indebted to Bergson.

FOR Péguy the poem had power to change mental perceptions, a power Mallarmé attributes to words themselves. In the *Holy Innocents* the poem became, in a modification of Symbolist esthetics, what we might almost call in theological terms grace prevenient touching the soul with *delectatio caelestis*, turning it to God. Péguy followed Pascal's orthodoxy in that, after Eden, man became an easy prey to *delectatio terrena*. But, unlike Pascal, he did not believe that God's choice necessarily falls upon those who are disposed to God in heart and soul, those who "*cherchent en gémissant*."

The truth is essentially order (as Pascal used it, not only to mean human order, or the rhetorical order of classical French stylistics, but more the arrangement of values in which all Frenchmen, past or present, saint or sinner, noble or common, took part). The unhappiness of France, he must have thought, lay in her unawareness of this underlying order of belief, that France did, in fact, belong to the Christian family.

Bergson's sense of inquietude undoubtedly attracted Péguy, although the materialistic tendency in Bergson's thought did not involve Péguy. His concept of the real was close to Bergson's "multiplicity of penetration." As Péguy once wrote: "Il y a un pathétique de la pensée et il y a une lumière et une clarté du cœur. Qu'est-ce qu'une pensée qui n'aurait pas de cœur? Et qu'est-ce qu'un cœur qui ne serait pas éclairé au soleil de la pensée." The real thus came to mean for Péguy a sort of link between the realms of spirit and matter. The two were joined, in their way, in the *Holy Innocents*, which showed the necessity of thought and action; both were a part of a working salvation and were needed to combat what he called the crime of *désespérance*. And, with as much moral indignation as Tolstoy, he could point out *le mal universel humain* in the incident of the murder of working men in an attempted strike put down by the Imperial Guard in St. Petersburg. In *Marcel*, even before his conversion in 1909, he maintained that *La Révolution sera morale ou elle ne sera pas* (1896).

Péguy established the role of memory of the national past. In the *Holy Innocents* he made it a free action, an act of childlike faith, a sort of Catholic *acte gratuit* springing from a sincere source of spiritual honesty.

# Book-Reviews

## French Poetry, 1950

*Mid-century French Poets, Selections, Translations and Critical Notices.* By Wallace Fowlie. Twayne Publishers. \$4.50.

CONTEMPORARY French prose is readily appreciated by the American reader who is interested in current French literature whether it be in the field of the novel, the drama, the essay, or of biographical and critical studies. If one should be unable to enjoy reading the text in French for want of sufficient knowledge of the language one can usually find an adequate translation. However, in the case of poetry the situation is quite different. Few are those who dare to claim that they are either interested in it or capable of genuine appreciation. So, whenever a new collection of French verse in translation is published in the United States, there is truly cause to rejoice. In *Mid-century French Poets*, by Wallace Fowlie, we find precisely such an occasion.

Wallace Fowlie, well known as a writer in his own rights, enjoys an equally enviable place among scholars in the field of contemporary French letters. With this bilingual edition of contemporary French verse he gives the American reader an opportunity to acquaint himself with some of the best poets of our time. Tracing the development of the genre from Baudelaire to the present day poets born since 1900, in his Introduction we find an excellent study of the spirit, the manner and the atmosphere which characterize the works of the poets with whom Mr. Fowlie concerns himself as their translator. A chronological list accompanies this thought-provoking presentation. In it the reader will find the poets divided in six groups: forerunners; symbolists and those in the symbolist tradition; oldest generation in the twentieth century; second generation; and finally the poets born since 1900. A critical essay precedes the texts chosen for translation, and, mindful of an academic practice, Mr. Fowlie adds a selected bibliography for each poet he presents.

As we turn the pages of this anthology, 273 pages in all, we find the following poets represented: Max Jacob, Léon-Paul Fargue, Jules Supervielle, Saint-John Perse, Jean Cocteau, André Breton, Paul Eluard, Robert Desnos, Henri Michaux and Pierre Emmanuel. Obviously Mr. Fowlie chose to give the lion's share to the surrealist poets. One may deplore his decision to do so, and wish that the reader may have had the opportunity to find in *Mid-century French Poets* some of the immortal lines of Charles Péguy, Paul Valéry, Francis Jammes, Paul Claudel, to name but a few of the great poets not represented in this volume. But, after all, as a translator and an anthologist, one is entitled to freedom of choice and has no doubt personal and esthetic reasons for limiting the scope of such an undertaking. Nevertheless, this reviewer cannot refrain from wishing that more of the great poems written by the Resistance poets had been included in this collection. Behind the barbed wire of concentration camps, in the prisoner-of-war compounds in Germany, in secrecy poetry was more than a form of pure esthetic experience or escape: it became a moral force, a weapon against oppression, despair and even madness. It was indeed "les armes de la douleur" as Eluard called it. Thus was created one of the most lasting documents

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of the life and thoughts of Man imprisoned. One need only think of Eluard's poem on *liberté*: "Sur mes cahiers d'écolier . . ." While reading it, one becomes aware of the tremendous power of simple words and can hardly resist a desire to learn it by heart. It was my privilege to hear one of the poets of the Resistance, a philosopher by profession, read before a gathering of American and French intellectuals, a few poems he had written during his captivity at Drancy. I shall never forget the sense of communion in exile, in physical and spiritual suffering which gripped the audience as the poet read in a calm, almost timid voice.

Beyond these reservations, the selections included in *Mid-century French Poets* remain significant examples of the works of their authors and of the talent of their translator. If the reader happens to be a down-to-earth type of person, if he should be looking for models of disciplined lucidity he is bound to be greatly perplexed, and he may not find that the translations provide him with a clearer understanding of the original text. They may appear to be nothing more than "unconscious ravings" as a reader of my acquaintance called some of these poems. It is the fate of contemporary art, music, and poetry to seem meaningless to the uninitiated. As for me, the translated text was often a stimulating and delightful bilingual experience. I am thinking especially of selections such as "Mon quartier," "Saint Germain des Prés" or "A Saint Germain" of Léon-Paul Fargue which aroused in me a nostalgic longing; also of Robert Desnos' simple and poignant lines in "Tu prends la première rue" or "Poème à la Mystérieuse," "J'ai tant rêvé de toi," and of the tragic beauty of "La Victoire de Guernica" by Paul Eluard, in direct contrast to the tender little poem of Jules Supervielle "Ce pur enfant." A few typographical errors which were noted in passing as I read will not alter greatly the worth of this collection of poems, but may be mentioned in closing: *apérituf* for *apéritif* on page 54; *poigns* for *poings* on page 90; *raison* for *raison* on page 160; *Bonour* for *Bonjour* on page 222.

The interested reader must indeed be grateful to Wallace Fowlie for having applied his remarkable knowledge and talent to the publication of such an excellent volume of translated contemporary French poems. *Mid-century French Poets* would be a valuable addition to the library of readers and scholars interested in French literature of today.

University of Wisconsin

GERMAINE MERCIER

### Too Quiet

*Sealed Unto the Day*. Selected Poems from *Spirit*. 1949-1954. Edited by John Gilliland Brunini. Catholic Poetry Society of America, Inc. \$3.00.

IF I counted correctly, there are eighty poets represented in this gleaning of the best poetry published in *Spirit* from March 1949 to January 1954. Though the pages of *Spirit* are open to all poets who have sufficient ability and are willing to join the Catholic Poetry Society of America, presumably the latter requirement ensures that a majority of the contributors are sympathetic to the Christian tradition.

We have then a collection of recent poems by writers who take Christianity, in its Roman Catholic or other manifestations, seriously. The source material is

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at hand to consider the question: what difference does Christianity make to a modern poet?

The question is no sooner posed than the impossibility of answering it is evident. We are concerned not merely with poets, but with editors. As one of the editors of *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, I know how utterly beyond my ability it is to become an angelic being, free of all mortal biases, in the realm of poetry. I know that certain types of verse immediately appeal to me, and others warm me up very slowly. I assume that the editors of *Spirit* are likewise mortals, and that their likes and dislikes are reflected by the insights and techniques of the poets here represented.

The question must be rephrased to "What is the total impression of this collection of verse?" I think I can briefly summarize my impression: competence and caution. There are the occasional glorious poems, that flap wings and soar above all second thought, but in general the works preserved in *Scaled Unto the Day* are calculated less to excite than to refrain from offending. Blatant mistakes of technique are almost non-existent; the crudities of the amateur are banished from these hallowed pages. And banished also, with a few exceptions, are extremes. The traditional poets are cautiously traditional, the "modern" poets are cautiously "modern." A muted good taste—in verse and in faith—is the dominant tone.

What I miss is wildness and the shout of exaltation. I wish a Gerard Manley Hopkins had submitted his work to *Spirit*. There is in truth a whirling vitality about the Christian faith, a ferment in the new wine which makes it dangerous for shopworn bottles. That vitality and ferment seem handled gingerly here, and half domesticated, lest they get out of control.

One may, of course, point out another side to all this. The Christian faith, which is the undergirding of the majority of these poems, is a very firm foundation even when expressed in low, quiet voices. Muted Christianity can still be more filling to the hungry spirit than nihilism shouted to the wild winds. Therefore, the reader who goes through *Scaled Unto the Day* is quietly nourished, religiously as well as esthetically. But except at rare intervals, he is not caught up in a blaze of light among the singing angels.

Beloit College

CHAD WALSH

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### Money and Courage

*The Cashier*. By Gabrielle Roy. Translated by Harry Binsse. Harcourt, Brace. \$3.50.

THE FIRST few chapters of Gabrielle Roy's new novel, *The Cashier*, read like a variation on a theme of Peguy:

God speaks: I am talking about those who work and who, in this,  
Obey my commandment, poor children.  
And who on the other hand lack courage, lack confidence, and don't  
sleep. . . .

They have the courage to work. They lack the courage to be idle.  
And as the reader continues, he realizes that this book is very much the story of today's little man, caught in a world not of his making, weighed down by a

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sense of responsibility for what he is impotent to change, and lacking the hope that any higher power can change it.

Alexandre Chenevert is the cashier whose daily round of home and Montreal bank is the epitome of Thoreau's "life of quiet desperation." The frustrations of his life do not result from ambition thwarted or pleasure denied; rather they arise from a search for happiness which he feels ultimately to be wrong, for "happiness results basically from an inequality." He cannot be happy while others are unhappy. He sees happiness not as a future goal nor as an eternal fruit of his present life, but rather as a state of irresponsibility to which he dare not abandon himself as long as his contemporaries in Israel and Pakistan and Korea are unhappy.

M. Chenevert struggles vainly, but almost heroically, to arrange the whole universe in the tidiest fashion, but he is stifled by a sense of his own inferiority in the presence of a world of smoothly functioning machines. He is more timid and obscure than any other man; yet no man could be more inarticulately rebellious against obscurity, more hopelessly desirous to prove his unique worth, more sensitive to the pain and loneliness of others, or more grandiosely and pretentiously aware of that sensitivity.

He lives in a private Inferno of insomnia and joyless work. Beset by neuroses, anxieties, vague pains, nameless fears, he finds no respite in his home, his wife, his daughter. Indeed, his wife seems to him the supreme example of all he most pities, hates, and is powerless to help. His daughter appears as nothing but life's hopeless suffering made incarnate. Her brief visit home with her little son only serves to accentuate Alexandre's helplessness by bringing home to him his inability to fulfill the boy's natural trust in his grandfather.

Upon his life made intolerable by pinpricks falls the cruelest blow—an error of \$100 in his accounts, after eighteen years of perfect record. Fear of dismissal turns to an unexpected ecstasy of relief at the prospect of escape; but his joy is quenched by his blandly helpful manager, who suggests a monthly pay cut to make up the deficit, and, in a burst of condescending kindness, urges a trip to the doctor. The doctor's prescription is—happiness. Obediently but hopelessly, Alexandre seeks it, dragging with him his previous futile attempts at happiness in the form of his honeymoon luggage. He rents from a farmer a small deserted trapper's cabin in the forest, and here he woos happiness. But he is appalled by his lack of capacity for it and his omnipresent sense of guilt in his search.

But solitude works its medicine, and bestows on him, if not happiness, at least indifference. Here in the forest, one perfect day liberates him into beauty, peace, and at last friendship with the farmer's family; nor is the least of the joys of the day the astonishing realization that they accept him quite simply and make no demands on him.

Yet mere hours later Alexandre's world has again begun to gnaw at his life, with ravages similar to those that disease is making upon his body. The doctor, in prescribing for Alexandre's spirit, has neglected his body, and the cashier is forced into a hospital to face a long and slow death. Finally in suffering, however, he learns to accept the vast unreason of life, its need for trust, for surrender; he learns the lesson first met in his cabin solitude, the lesson of joy and not resentment that God seeks him despite his inadequate response.

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From the opening paragraph of the book Alexandre is meticulously revealed as the epitome of modern man. No other character is permitted to distract the reader or inject a note of wholesomeness to freshen the musty pettiness of the whole. Indeed, three other characters act as foils to etch more deeply the picture of the fearfully embraced slavery of the cashier: the bank manager by his gross insensitivity to pain and fear; the farmer by his completely simple acceptance of his world; and the hospital chaplain by his unthinking and never tested assurance that he knows the answer to every problem.

Alexandre's life is a product not of where he is, but of what he is; Gabrielle Roy's realism, unerring in precision of detail, lies in presenting the meanness and vulgarity of background and characters not as influences, but as evidences that Alexandre is pitifully limited not by time or place, but by himself. Yet he is aware of this. One of the few beings for whom he can feel true compassion is his own soul, imprisoned in its limitations as actually as he is in his teller's cage.

Miss Roy has given the reader a portrait of modern man, possibly not great, but surely exquisitely and painstakingly precise; a portrait more human for being complex, more compassionate for being unattractive. Finally the reader comes to understand with Alexandre that he is indeed "precious, unique, and in some sort beyond replacing," for man is not the measure of himself.

SISTER M. EMMANUEL, S.L.

### Black Cat, White Collar

*The Presence of Grace.* By J. F. Powers. Doubleday. \$2.95.

A REVIEWER can recommend J. F. Powers' new anthology and know that readers of the most diverse tastes will vindicate his judgment. For Mr. Powers manages to bring the short story out of the esotericism it has drifted into in the last thirty years. All nine of the stories in this volume are thoroughly readable without research into abnormal psychology. This is not to imply that the stories are merely clever trivia.

This book's most important single contribution to literature is its consistent distinction between the serious and the pretentious. The writing is not unpsychological; it is simply not concerned with the slop buckets of psychology. In fact, it deals with something that few psychologists and not enough fiction writers have the skill or insight to approach: the normal.

The normal reality of normal Catholics is Mr. Powers' particular field. He presents a much more persuasive argument for the Church than a large number of his glumly pondering contemporaries do. *The Presence of Grace* does not contain a single problem which is fundamentally spiritual. Here is a Catholic writer who recognizes and is not afraid to say, indirectly, that Catholics, and especially the clergy, can be the least tormented of humanity. Mr. Powers' characters do not feel profound disturbances, because within their Catholicism there are no profound questions left unanswered. There is a nice irony in Mr. Powers' suggestion that Catholics can be happy people who do not have to suffer a lifelong anguish. The salvation which to the Protestant or Agnostic must be a lonely and terrible probing, is to the Catholic only a Saturday afternoon duty.

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Contemporary readers have become so used to negatively introspective short stories, they will often take seriously any smooth writing that is intellectually and emotionally soggy. If they chance onto an amusing or happy story, they tend to automatically catalogue it as slight. No doubt there are critics who would describe *The Presence of Grace* stories as slight. Certainly another of the finest twentieth century story writers has suffered because of this attitude. Frank O'Connor's Irish Catholic stories are in all truth at times as funny as Chaucer's tales, but because his people refuse to see all creation as a cesspool or a chopping block, he is often ranked as second rate rather than first. The same is true of J. F. Powers.

*The Presence of Grace* is complex; it is serious; and its complexity and seriousness are focussed on man-to-man rather than man-to-God relations. At first glance the whimsy of certain stories and the clean and polished prose conceal this significant implication. One is so attracted to the story itself that he forgets it has point.

To illustrate—a major character in this book is a black cat with a white collar. In what this reviewer takes to be the best story in the anthology, "Defection of a Favorite," this cat is something of a combination of Saki's burlesque talking cat and one of Kafka's philosophical animals. "Fritz" is a highly intelligent and sophisticated cat and plays out his delicate game of power in the old rectory between pastor and curate with a Metternichean deftness. One is almost through the story before he senses how accurately the cat has gauged the struggle for power fought out over doormat purchases and mousing problems; and one realizes that this is the real human condition we hear so much ponderous talk about in regard to Gide and Sartre.

Mr. Powers' prose is that ultimate refinement of middle class American speech which we have come to associate with the *New Yorker*, where four of the nine stories in the anthology first appeared. A good deal of the book's humor depends on droll, subdued touches in certain images, little observations made in passing but made with precision. Among the old rubbish in a rectory cellar the young curate sees some "unemployed statues"; or in another story the meditative cat supposes that his two clerical enemies "were out killing poultry on the open road" in their car. In *New Yorker* writers this sort of cocktail party imagery is sometimes used for its own sake and frequently carries only a somewhat puerile ridicule. Mr. Powers' aim is structurally more sound. He uses such devices to point out that ordinary people direct most of what they take to be their greatest concerns along trivial lines and in mundane forms. The following quotation, from the title story, is a good example of this.

The pastor smiled. "You might say the scales dropped from my eyes," he said.

But by then Father Fabre, gazing at the cracker flak on the pastor's black bosom, had begun to wonder what all this had to do with a study club.

This story involves an apparent dotard and mumbler, the pastor, and his self-serious curate. The pastor's stubborn refusal to interpret obvious facts saves his church a scandal and teaches his curate humility. In this triumph of Grace over intellect a platitudinous old man who cannot as much as feed himself gracefully handles his lady parishoners with the genius of Moses, though in reverse.



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Mr. Powers' continued success in stories written out of ordinary Catholic materials indicates the coming of age of Catholicism as literary subject matter in America. None of *The Presence of Grace* stories contains any self-conscious attempts to excuse or justify the Church; there is no defensiveness of any sort. J. F. Powers' characters present the actual Catholic view. They believe, and, therefore, they are free to get on with living.

J. F. Powers is probably best thought of not as a Catholic writer but as a writer who happens to be Catholic.

In conclusion it is amusing to consider that literature cannot be both positive and true unless it is written out of a faith. J. F. Powers, by writing with a faith, is herding American literature back to a field where it can be truly enjoyed again.

ROBERT O. BOWEN

### And Yet . . .

*Selected Poems.* By Randall Jarrell. Knopf. \$4.00.

THIS selection of Jarrell's verse has been made from four volumes published since 1942 and includes a fairly wide range of settings and of metrical forms. The emotional atmosphere is fairly constant—a combination of searching and satire. The searching is all but hopeless. The satire is mild when applied to people, more bitter but usually a little tired when applied to institutions, especially to the political and economic systems. The object of the search almost never varies, no matter what the setting. It is a search for meaning in life, especially for the meaning of man, and the search reveals little if anything. One poem, "90 North," sums up much that Jarrell has to say. It is a comparison between a childhood dream of a North Pole expedition and an adult's experience of finding it. It seems defeatist, and yet the impression of the book is not one of defeat. As Mr. Nemerov said, in the *Sewanee Review*, there are in the collection "beautiful, sad, deep things." The sadness and depth result from the apparent hopelessness of so ultimate a search; the beauty springs from Jarrell's loving attachment to men (not in the mass, but man by man, as it were) and the values he sees in them. It is the final meaninglessness, for him, of such a being as man which causes his anguish.

Jarrell, then, persistently says one thing, and this might justify Howard Nemerov's suspicion that all his characters are "used" as mouthpieces for what he has to say. The word "character" reminds one that the poems are almost exclusively dramatic. They are about people to whom things, often rather lurid things, happen, and the comment is either put into the mouth of the character or expressed by the author. In "90 North," Jarrell speaks through the "I" of the poem. In the numerous war poems, it is often the soldiers who speak, as in the case of the much anthologized "Ball Turret Gunner," who says "From my mother's sleep I fell into the State," and ends his autobiography four lines later with "When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose." These first person poems tend to express their characters' confusion of mind, their



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pathetic refusal to believe there is no explanation of their existence and of the forces—especially death—which seem to interfere with their finding an answer.

When the poet speaks in his own person, the comments are often both more complex and more indulgent. Those who speak of themselves blurt out what they hold to be dreadful, inescapable truths. The poet speaking of others shows them sympathetically, points out what in them is worth continuance, worth even respect and affection, and so perhaps makes the final despair more terrible for the reader. Not that all the poems are so stark. Such reflections as those on "A Girl in a Library," or "Lady Bates," or "The Night Before the Night before Christmas," or "A Game at Salzburg," manage to convey the losing-game-of-life theme more gently and gradually.

What he is saying, then, is, life means nothing, but it *should* . . . but it *must*! A young Harvard professor has recently deplored the intellectualization of poetry, and insisted that it be an "animal cry." These poems are something better than that. They are the cry of the spirit in man revolting against the growing conviction that he is an animal. They are the cry of the man who will *not* be an animal only—at least not willingly. What the poems as a group are witness to is the unwillingness of the flesh to put *off* spirit, or at least to admit that humanity (whether it is or is not "our" creation) has not a meaning above the beasts'. They leave open the possibility that there *is* something which could have been learned or done, something which might still be learned or done to prove it has such a meaning. He says, speaking through the children of the "Carnegie Library, Juvenile Division,"

We found in you the knowledge for a life  
But not the will to use it in our lives  
That were always, somehow, so different from the books.  
We learn from you to understand, but not to change.

He is trying to say in a book what life really is like, as he sees it; and he has not, so far as I can see, given up hope that we *can* be changed—into what? Beings with a meaning? He keeps saying, like the old woman in "Hohensalzburg": "What you do will do, But not forever." There must be something which will "do, forever." The remainder, even the desire, is much, in the midst of many poetic "animal cries."

The poems are handled with skill. Jarrell does not care for rhyme or the established forms, which he rarely uses, although he occasionally uses them well. His favorite form is that "meaning set free in motion," as Maritain calls it, in which the balanced sections of the experience set up their own rhythm. The book, indeed, since it is apparently based on one "poetic experience" relived and progressively deepened, is almost, and not quite, a formal unity of its own in this sense. Certainly it constitutes a whole which could be called "Variations on a Theme." He gives this title to one of his poems, but adds "of Romantic Character." His book *is* romantic, for all its occasionally brutal realism. He says, like his Devil: "I never met the man I didn't love," and his favorite expression is ". . . and yet . . . and yet."

Newton College of the Sacred Heart

C. E. MAGUIRE

# Innocent But Harmful

*The Quiet American.* By Graham Greene. The Viking Press. \$3.50.

GRAHAM GREENE'S latest novel, *The Quiet American*, is not designed to foster concord of nations or to allay suspicions that economic foreign aid covers political maneuvers. By his title, the author has labeled his story as one in which racial types are to interpret his thesis: *incalculable damage is done by the invincibly ignorant when well-intentioned*. The primary symbol, reflecting Britain's withdrawal from colonial commitments, is the conflict of American and British nationals in solving Indo-China's problem; the secondary symbol, their struggle for the possession of the ex-taxi dancer, Phuong (Phénix).

For "invincibly ignorant," Greene has ironically substituted the word "innocent" with the meaning, not of un-harmful, but of non-culpable. Now, ignorance is a theological problem, defined by Saint Thomas (S.T., I-II, 85: 3) as one effect of original sin, the wounding of reason and prudence. The use of this ultimate as basis of his novel belies the blurb-writers and such critics as speak of a break, and a sudden one of matter and tone, in the Greene continuum of "religious themes." The double charge can be met by citing another book of Greene's.

In *The Lost Childhood*, he says that at fourteen

I had been supplied once and for all with a subject. . . . Goodness had only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey (p. 16).

The evil of malice, he exposed in *Brighton Rock*; that of pain, in *The Living Room*. He writes here of the third, the evil of *ignorance* in many forms. There is the bungling ignorance of Alden Pyle, his unawareness of complexity wherever human factors are concerned—a strange deficiency to be tolerated in a secret agent supposed to be attached to the United States Economic Mission at Saigon. It is foil to the rationalizing, self-deceptive ignorance of the narrator, Fowler, an aging English newsman who will not call himself a correspondent because he does not wish to be "involved." Phuong's Asiatic ignorance is not so much cunning of the serpent as unanalytical, principle-less adaptation to the protector who is at the moment better able to procure for her legal status, domesticated family life, security, with a touch of the glamour found in pictorial weeklies.

There is also the patriotic ignorance of the French whose logic is valid, once granted as first premise and first principle: the honour of France.

The [Free-Mason] colonel who had some sympathy with the [general of the army] bishop, for to each of them his country was more important than Catholicism (p. 54).

It is a lost war for which they must report only victories.

". . . You know the road to Hanoi is cut and mined every night. You know we lose one class of Saint-Cyr every year. . . . But we are professionals; we go on fighting till the politicians tell us to stop. . . ." (p. 201)

There is the pitiful ignorance of the Vietnamese peasants whose dead bodies clog the rivers and line the roads. They have been caught between opposing

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ideologies that originally came out of the West—Communism that detoured to come in under the masque of Chinese subsidies; Colonialism that exploited more than it benefited. There is even a special kind of 'innocence' among the natives who have government clerical positions. At the non-segregated night club

Two Vietnamese couples were dancing, small, neat, aloof, with an air of civilization we couldn't match (p. 43).

Reviewers have emphasized the fact that this is Graham Greene's first novel since *The End of the Affair* (1952). It and the play, *The Living Room*, were in the Greene tradition. Where questionable passages appeared, they could be explained as integral to the theme. But those readers of last year's entertainment-potboiler, *Loser Takes All*, were somewhat prepared for the excessive use in *The Quiet American* of suggestive incidents, physical details and erotic metaphors. These are uncalled for and they amount to structural faults. Their effect is not only shock for even the mature mind but short circuit—breaking the current of the story to marvel at the author's smartness (he is often tellingly apt), instead of lighting up the situation and affording insight.

There is a more serious technical defect. Graham Greene has failed this time, not in the choice of his characters but in their portrayal. This is especially true of the quiet American. Some reviewers have attributed the caricature which is Pyle to Green's personal animus against Americans or to a sniping urge shared with certain British periodicals which manage at least one shot each issue at our "adolescence." But, for a plot symbolizing global tensions, a brash young American is a necessary contrast with the seedy, knowing but not wise, opium-smoking Englishman. Only a young idealist would fight for the desirable but inscrutable and inconstant "oppressed Asiatic," against the Communist germ spreading from the infested Chinese enclaves. This reviewer, with the London *Tablet*, hopes "that Mr. Greene's fiction of American secret service is all based on fancy" (December 3rd, 1955). But if the Economic Mission were only what its title promised, and if Pyle's directives had been restricted to forwarding medical supplies, he would not have been stabbed with a rusty bayonet and drowned in the river at the city limits of Saigon. There would not have been the suspense while Monsieur Gigot of the Sûreté gathers details on the murder and detects Fowler's connivance, real but not indictable. This disciple of Gaboriau, blinded by love of his wife, is ignorant of her aberrations but he is one of the few characters with wisdom. On several occasions, quite honestly, he follows the rule: "*tout voir mais ne pas tout remarquer*." But he cannot understand Pyle and had said so when he called Fowler to identify the body.

"The trouble was," I [Fowler] said, "he got mixed up."

"To speak plainly," Vigot said, "I am not altogether sorry. He was doing a lot of harm."

"God save us always," I said, "from the innocent and the good."

"The good?"

"Yes, good. In his way. You're a Roman Catholic. You wouldn't recognize his way. And anyway, he was a damned Yankee."

Pyle's incomprehensible way of acting, his disastrous course motivated by his best intentions, his unmaliciousness hardness, his practical inhumanity, his lack of conscience to disquiet him—all had to have a source in intellectualism.

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Therefore, he is created a son of an intellectual, of the greatest authority on under-water erosion. Young Alden grows up a Unitarian, humorless, and is educated in the dry intellectualism of Harvard.

It is possible but not probable that someone whose only training was book-learning would be attached in a subordinate capacity to an economic mission. But (if the secret project is not a libel on United States foreign aid), no government would commission such a ninny as a political agent. It would not abet bomb incidents killing native civilians (after its own personnel and their households, including *Phuong*, had timely warning). The rival factions among the Vietnamese were of the stuff of comedy until one counted the dead and maimed, but the choice of any one group as nucleus of a Third Force between Communism and Colonialism required discrimination too great for any government to confide to the likes of Pyle. Every country has its quota of short-division minds which see people as our team and the other team, those who suppose anyone who is anti-Communist is pro-us, but the State Departments do not send them abroad with plenipotentiary faculties. Neither would it have paid the passage for anyone who talks like Alden Pyle; he would have been retained as the office joke. Graham Greene's ear has played him false. He has not caught either the diction or the rhythm of English as spoken in these United States. (One small but significant item: educated British say "That's him," but Americans, even the non-Harvard, do not.)

Fowler has always looked at Pyle as an American. When he bemoans the loss of *Phuong*, he rings the changes on Pyle's youth, his material security, his freedom to offer marriage and, somehow, makes them seem national assets. Even on the day he first met Pyle, he assayed him:

With his gangly legs and his crew cut and his wide campus gaze, he seemed incapable of harm. . . . Why, ten days ago he had been walking back across the Common in Boston, his arms full of books he had been reading in advance on the Far East and the problems of China. . . . He was absorbed already in the dilemmas of democracy and the responsibilities of the West; he was determined . . . to do good, not to any individual person, but to a country, a continent, a world. Well, he was in his new element now, with the whole universe to improve. (p. 13f.)

This earnestness irritates Fowler who repeats his determination not to be "involved." He refuses the promotion which would take him to England and his High Church wife who has refused to divorce him. He is cynical about Pyle's abstract idealism, his fair play even in the game of love (only *Phuong's* best interests are to be taken into consideration; Fowler serving as interpreter for *Alden Pyle* had been Miles Stanish in reverse). He has never forgiven Pyle for saving his life in a Vietnam attack. He says that he came East to die, but his constant complaint is fear of old age without *Phuong* and without her tendence of his opium pipes. Therefore, when the Chinese Heng, cell leader of the Communists, has information about Pyle's connection with plastic bombs, Fowler listens. He has always called himself a non-Christian, a man without religion, one whose occasional acts of pity were prompted by selfishness—a distaste to see suffering. But he is appalled at the horrors caused by the bomb which wiped out a shopping crowd of women and children instead of the column of soldiers expected to parade. Pyle in his shock remarks about the

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blood on his shoes and the need to get a shine before he reports to the American Minister. Fowler, granting

I don't think he knew what he was saying. He was seeing a real war for the first time,

nevertheless, goes to Mr. Heng, who is the calmer of the two. Fowler is prepared to help the Communists dispatch Pyle. His task is to call the American to his rooms, arrange the assignation, signal the watcher outside.

All but the last act was completed when Fowler hesitates. But to an Englishman convinced that Americans look upon cash as the cure for all ailments and healing for all wounds, Pyle furnishes sufficient provocation:

"It was a terrible shock today, Thomas, but in a week, you'll see, we'll have forgotten it. We are looking after the relatives too."

"We?"

We've wired to Washington. We'll get permission to use some of our funds."

... I went to the window ... (p. 233).

The full story is the narrator's own secret. Gigot left after tactfully outlining the evidence they had acquired. Fowler, the old Englishman, regrets that he did not play cricket and own up to seeing Pyle before the quiet American went to his death. The same evening brings a cable from his wife releasing him. Phuong, elated, goes off to boast to her mentor-sister that she is "the Second Mrs. Fowlair."

And he:

Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry.

F. A. McGOWAN

## Too Much Criticism?

*Directions in Contemporary Criticism and Literary Scholarship.* By James Craig La Drière. Milwaukee: Bruce. \$2.75.

THE LECTURE which developed into this little book was delivered at Marquette University in December, 1953, on the occasion of the dedication of the new University Memorial Library. It was the fourth in the Gabriel Richard Lecture Series co-sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association.

The choice of Professor La Drière, Catholic University, for this assignment was well inspired. Dr. La Drière is an authority in the field of literary theory, an acute analyst as well as a writer of subtle power and charm.

The author examines the state of literary criticism today. His point of departure is Mr. Randall Jarrell's *Poetry and the Age*, with its thesis that this is an age of too much criticism. It is not, says La Drière. We still do not know enough to formulate the ideal of a critical method. But "a method is only a way of being intelligent." Agreeing with Eliot's declaration that the chief tools of the critic are comparison and analysis, he suggests that what we need to develop in particular is the latter. The techniques of modern critical analysis are still quite elementary. "The weakness of modern analytical tech-

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nique is that it has not been adequately generalized by theory: it lacks clear formulation of the principles which ground it." Aristotle perhaps most clearly approached the ideal balance of comparison and analysis.

It is one of the chief confusions of contemporary criticism, says La Drière, to forget that "a method derived from a poetics or a rhetoric will lead only to poetic or rhetorical fact and value." It is a serious error "to suppose or to behave as if the establishment of a poetic value by the means proper to a poetics implies establishment of philosophical or moral or social value and relieves us of the responsibility of assessing imputed values of these other kinds by the methods proper to philosophy or ethics or a social science." The latter is the error of the humanists, from Arnold to Babbitt. The theoretical considerations which are most important of all in determining critical method are those which concern the nature of the critical act itself. Criticism is "simply the addition to spontaneous evaluation of something in the way of knowledge relevant to this evaluation." The function of criticism is not primarily that of mediating between art and its public. "A man becomes a critic because he has a curiosity about his experience of art, and not merely a general curiosity about the value in this experience. The measure of achievement in criticism is the success such a man has in converting curiosity to knowledge, and the depth and precision of the knowledge."

Pure impressionism is now discredited, because it did not see the artistic object "as in itself it really is." Similarly the German effort to assimilate the literary phenomenon into the universal system of a general *Geisteswissenschaft* failed because its proponents did not realize what the formal object of literary study should be (the romantic idealism on which their work was grounded was in large part responsible for their failure). Modern criticism, especially the criticism of Eliot and Pound, is at work in attempting to carry out Arnold's ideal method. It retains, "and in its typical practice emphasizes much more than Arnold himself did or perhaps conceived possible, 'the endeavour . . . to see the object as in itself it really is.'" For criticism appears only when affirmations of value are subjected to intellectual scrutiny. "All values are more or less general, more or less special, and they are all interrelated; but the critical examination of them is always special, and is effective in the degree to which it is specialized."

While an ideally exact specification of the literary *datum* has not yet been achieved by our literary theory, La Drière concludes, "we are not far, I think, from an age in which the best of Arnold's ideals will have been attained, and his confusions and ours superseded. For though we do not yet *know enough*, our criticism is more deeply committed to the venture of knowing than that of Arnold's time, and our literary scholarship, theory, and history are in better relation with the strictly critical undertaking." What we may still learn from Arnold is "disinterestedness, the willingness to subordinate our interests and advantages to the pursuit of truth 'without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever.'"

Well reasoned, clearly expressed, fully documented, this little book deserves to be widely read by students, teachers and critics as well practical as academic. It is utterly free from the vagueness and confusions of so much writing on the theory of criticism.

VICTOR M. HAMM

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### Day by Day

*Journal: IV* (1943-1945), *V* (1946-1950), *VI* (1950-1954). By Julien Green.  
Paris: Plon.

THERE is, I suppose, no literary form which has exercised upon contemporary men of letters an attraction more despotical than that of the personal diary. But the enthusiasm of the authors themselves has been, if anything, largely surpassed by that of their public, in which has been generated an apparently insatiable appetite for this type of composition. The production of day-by-day confidences has taken on the aspect of a mass industry. At this very moment, in France and elsewhere, thousands of writers are recording, not certainly for posterity but surely for their immediate contemporaries, their culinary, sentimental, political and literary predilections and prejudices; the minutiae of their physiological, social, religious and literary inquietudes and particularities; catalogues of books read, films seen, acquaintances encountered, conversations held, opinions promulgated, works undertaken or abandoned. I seem to remember reading not very long ago that a Parisian newspaper had found it worth its while to offer a *prix du journal intime*. How is one to account for the extraordinary vogue of this sort of thing?

The fashion, you may say, but *why* the fashion? There was, of course, the immediate influence and example of Gide and of a long line of romantic forerunners stretching back even beyond Rousseau, the enormous impact of "confession" literature. These writers had all assumed that integral *sincerity* was in great measure attainable and that, if attainable, it signified unalloyed virtue, perhaps the supreme virtue. Discretion was unnatural and hypocritical, hence immoral and vicious. The *man* instead of (or at least overshadowing) the work: how much more exciting for the reading public!

There were, no doubt, in such an attitude, implications of pharisaism all the more insidious because not instantly obvious. What these writers were in effect saying, even if not invariably aware that they were saying it, was something like this: "See how much more honest and sincere we are than other people are. For do not *we* publicly affirm about ourselves things which other people, slaves to decrepit convention and artificial morality, would be ashamed, perhaps afraid, to confess even to themselves? Is it possible adequately to admire and applaud our truthfulness, our courage, our total consecration to a higher (because more *sincere*) sense of morality and social obligation? Prophets of a new covenant, it is our mission to lead mankind from familiar sloughs of hypocritical conformity to hitherto unapproached summits of moral candor upon which all humankind will stand, altogether naked and not the least bit ashamed."

There was a further pharisaism in their emphasis upon the *human*, the assumption being that whatever was human, hence imperfect, was necessarily good, and that, therefore, what was most fully human hence farthest removed from perfection, was most completely good. Any attempt, or even any mere velleity, to transcend the human condition, constituted, then, the serious offense of lèse-humanity. "From our published confidences you have been able to observe," these writers said in effect, "how entirely and authentically *human* we are. For we *are* more human and more natural than other people are; we



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make no attempt and have no desire to transcend our humanity; we are, therefore, more complete and fully integrated beings than other people are. The conclusion follows necessarily that we are (because more *human* and *natural* and *spontaneous* and *sincere*) superior to other people."

The *journal intime* satisfied, moreover, in some degree, a craving for personal immortality. As, in an increasingly secularized society, the presence of God appeared more and more remote, the prospect of some sort of survival seemed less and less assured. It was comforting, therefore, to feel that, for some time to come, the facts and even the trivia of one's individual mundane existence had been assimilated into recorded and published history. In 2054 surely, in 2154 perhaps, the world would still be aware that, on such-and-such a date Author X had read such-and-such a book, that on such-and-such a date he had dined in such-and-such a restaurant and had seen such-and-such a film, that on such-and-such a date he had such-and-such an idea and a bad cold in the head. For so long as that record subsisted Author X would have eluded the definitive oblivion in which the words, thoughts and acts of the great mass of mankind lie buried: he would have achieved, by means of his published personality, a measure of immortality.

The most surprising aspect, perhaps, of contemporary confessional literature—of the *journal intime* published at regular intervals during the lifetime of its author—was that it should have satisfied its public no less abundantly than (whoever he might be) its ambitious begetter. Yet there was, if one reflects a bit, nothing very mysterious about its success. It satisfied, in the first place, in the inarticulate public, an unavowed craving for order, pattern, form; for the personal diary is, in spite of its apparent artlessness, negligence and impromptu, one of the most carefully studied and consciously contrived of literary vehicles. And people in general, moreover, as the success of psychiatric therapy shows, find relief and pleasure in talking about themselves. The reader of the *journal intime*, therefore, by identifying himself with its author, experiences a considerable, if vicarious, thrill: "There is someone who is not afraid of boring people by relating the trivial—or of shocking them by recounting the stupid, ugly or shameful—facts of his private and everyday existence. How sincere and courageous he is! He is doing what I should like to do and do not dare to do. But, while I am reading him, I too am doing it. I too, for the time being, am courageous, natural, spontaneous, sincere."

The reader undergoes, no doubt, in most instances, a highly mechanized existence. He needs heroes to admire. But there is, in life as he knows and sees it, a serious shortage of heroes and heroism: he finds little that is heroic in himself, in his friends and acquaintances. To fill this need heroes must be synthetically fabricated. If they prove to be rather unheroic heroes, so much the better: they are more "human" and hence more readily understandable. He is fervently interested in biography. Biographical details of the kind which Sainte-Beuve and his critical posterity have rendered so fashionable and all-important, biographical details of the "personal," "intimate," "human" sort. Such details keep the hero within approachable distance: they facilitate the process of identification of reader with hero: they offer comfortable guarantees that the hero will not prove *too* heroic. If one's hero is as *human* as oneself, then he makes no claims to being *better* than oneself. We live in an equal-



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itarian era: is not the literature of confession much more safely and incontestably equalitarian than, say, high tragedy?

As regards the general public, then, the vogue of this literature might seem a strictly normal phenomenon. It is less evident why, with a Catholic public and Catholic writers, it should enjoy comparable popularity. One had supposed that confession in public was a specifically Protestant institution. There had been, of course, the case of St. Augustine. But St. Augustine's purpose had been clearly to show *not* how "human" one might become if one put forth adequate effort, but rather to illustrate how, by the aid of God's grace, it was possible to *transcend* one's "humanity." It would probably not have occurred to St. Augustine to publish a *journal intime* in the form of serial bulletins. In the scramble for integral "sincerity" there have been, however, few participants more fervent, conscientious and industrious than certain contemporary Catholic writers.

The case of Julien Green is, perhaps, one of the most illuminating and representative. With regard to conception and form, his *Journal* is modelled directly upon that of André Gide. Certain turns of phrase and thought, certain stylistic mannerisms and rhetorical devices, certain established conventions of the genre, insistently attest the force and depth of that influence (there are, of course, as one would expect, essential divergences, of tone notably). Yet, while persuaded of the virtues of integral "sincerity" *per se* and of the *journal intime* for popular consumption, Green has had moments of acute misgiving. Is entire sincerity really possible? Can one actually tell everything or even the most important things? Can there be, strictly speaking, such a thing as an authentic *journal intime*? Does not the personal diary, like a convex or concave mirror, leave us with, in the end, a thoroughly distorted and grimacing image of the personality of the diarist? Green admits that his true journal is contained in his works of fiction, that in them he approaches most nearly to his ideal of honesty and sincerity, that in them he is most authentically personal. Yet, from his diary, he has already published extracts extending over a period of some twenty-six years, from 1928 to 1954; and the forthcoming edition of his *Œuvres complètes* promises, among other things, a more complete (if not yet integral) version of the part of the diary already published.

The most recent volumes of Green's *Journal* offer evidence of the completeness with which he has mastered this most popular of contemporary literary forms (for a very large number, surely, of the "serious" novels of our time are essentially glorified diaries). If one has (after duly registering one's objections) accepted the conventions of the genre, he will find Green's *Journal* extremely absorbing: he will find in it a great deal that seems worth rereading. Vol. IV covers the last years of Green's exile in the land of his ancestors and his return to the country in which, culturally and spiritually, he felt really at home. Vol. V contains a record of the difficult years immediately following the "end" of World War II in 1945, the years in which, no less than Green himself, France was attempting to return to "normal" living in a world from which most things traditionally taken for granted seemed permanently to have disappeared.

It is true that, more successfully than most returning exiles, Green was able to resume a way of life and work which the Second World War might irremediably have interrupted. He returned to find his library and papers

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intact, most of his friends surviving, a loyal public for whom, clearly, he was already assuming the proportions of a consecrated classic. Since that return, although publishing two novels, *Si j'étais vous* and *Moïra*, which bear comparison with the best of his earlier work, Green has devoted a great part of his energies and talent to writing for the theatre. Vol VI gives, so to speak, a play by play account of this struggle, which was only partially successful. Of the two plays which, up to the present, he has had acted and published, the first, *Sud*, was an unusually good one; the second, *L'Ennemi*, tedious, prolix, confused, failed rather miserably.

The topics with which, in his *Journal*, Green is mainly concerned, group themselves under three general headings:

(1) His personal life, i.e., his outward or mundane existence, and his inner or spiritual life, in which religious inquietudes and aspirations figure so insistently. He concludes rightly that, even were his *Journal* given the form of a posthumous "confession," it would still not be possible for him to tell absolutely *everything*: that still less would it be possible to attain integral "sincerity" in a work destined for almost *immediate* publication. He contents himself, therefore, with elaborate and frequent hints that a great deal has been left unsaid and that some day the reader of the (posthumously published) "integral" version of his *Journal* may see him, if not as he really was, at least as it pleased him to see himself. But, actually, does he not tell us either far too little or a great deal too much?

(2) His problem as a writer and, more specifically, his problems as a Catholic writer. Is it possible to be at the same time a good novelist and a good Catholic? Is literary creation really possible without, as Gide suggested, the collaboration of the demon? (For Gide, of course, who had lost his belief in God, and for whom an intermittent belief in the Devil represented little more than a mildly entertaining literary device, the very existence of the problem which tormented Green and Mauriac was the most delectable of jokes.) Like Mauriac, Green has not succeeded in resolving this difficulty, nor has he succeeded in adding very much to what Mauriac had already said. One might remark that, in discussing his own work, Green has, perhaps, a tendency to *explain*, far too directly and explicitly, the intentions and implications underlying it.

(3) His relations with other people, friends and other writers. His conversations with Gide are especially interesting. I have emphasized the very considerable influence which, from the beginning, Gide had exerted upon Green and the circumstance that the latter's *Journal* clearly descends in a direct line from that of the author of the *Nourritures terrestres*. Gide had never quite forgiven Green his conversion and his continuing religious faith; become a militant atheist, the aged Master had lost none of his proselytizing fervor; the role of Mephisto to Green's Faust clearly entertained him. "Si vous faisiez une petite embardée du côté du diable?" While his efforts to de-convert Green were not successful (and they seem never to have met without one or more such attempts on the part of Gide), he did succeed in making the younger writer at times extremely uncomfortable.

It is, of course, not yet possible to attempt a final and adequate evaluation of a "Work in Progress" such as this. But I believe that, while Green's reputation endures (and he is surely one of the better writers of his generation),

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readers will find more of permanent interest in his novels than in his *Journal* and that they will, ultimately, prefer the novelist to the diarist, the writer to the man (or the image of the man reflected in the *Journal*) even if (and perhaps because) they find the writer less "human," fallible, imperfect. As Green himself has admitted: "mon véritable journal est dans mes romans."

JOHN H. MEYER

### The First Word

*Panorama de la Littérature contemporaine aux Etats-Unis.* By John Brown.  
Paris: Gallimard.

THIS HANDBOOK to contemporary American literature fills a thirty-year void on French bookshelves. In his prize-winning attempt to bring French readers up to date on American literature, John Brown, cultural attaché to the U.S. embassy in Brussels, not only reveals the breadth and scope of American writing since World War I but also makes plain to American readers some of the depths and shallows of current French taste. Although the French are well-schooled in English literature, their knowledge of American writing, according to Brown, resembles a medieval map containing large unexplored regions inhabited by strange monsters and giants. Thus occurs the anomaly of works by Poe, Whitman, James, Wharton and Cooper being old favorites in France, while the names of Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne and Melville are relatively unknown to the French public. Of modern writers, Ellen Glasgow, Thornton Wilder and Willa Cather remain largely unread, whereas Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Caldwell and Dos Passos are hailed as America's "cinq grands"; and the expatriate Henry Miller is taken quite seriously, even by Brown. If the French concept of American fiction seems jagged and opaque, their notion of American poetry is shoddy and tattered. Some of our hardboiled novelists strongly influence French fiction: Dos Passos, Hemingway and Faulkner, for example, have passed their literary techniques on to Sartre, Malraux and Camus; and even the more *gentil* novelists have at least been translated into French. The poets have fared worse. Until their inclusion in this volume, even the best of their works were strangers to French soil. "Que de choses nous ignorions!" cried a reviewer in *La Croix*. "Nous ne savions pas que les Etats-Unis avaient produit Emily Dickinson, le plus grande poète féminin de langue anglaise." Pound, Eliot and Frost were equally unheard of.

Brown makes a tripartite attempt to introduce his readers to the best of American writing. Part One is a 334-page introduction replete with biographical sketches, plot summaries, incisive criticism, and capsule histories of recent trends ranging all the way from regionalism to science-fiction, from the novel of ideas to the detective story. Part Two, entitled "Illustrations," consists of 117 pages, in smaller type, which offer tantalizing excerpts from translated American fiction, bilingual versions of some of our most piercing poetry, serviceable bibliographies of primary sources, and twenty glossy photographs remarkable for their freshness: Nelson Algren sitting on a curbstone, Truman Capote for once not in his hammock. Part Three, entitled "Documents," presents, in still smaller type, 74 pages of "Problème et Idées" and "Choses vues,

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Choses vécues" in the form of essays by leading American authors, thinkers, journalists and historians.

No single volume could pretend to treat each writer exhaustively, and no one could expect the author of so delectable a handbook to be totally traditional or original in approach. Thus the morsels of criticism in Brown's salmagundi are substantial but not surfeiting, pungent but not blistering, toothsome but not ambrosial. Most of Brown's observations, moreover, obviously distilled from wide reading, seem to be either diluted for the sake of easy digestion or short-measured because of spatial limitations. His remarks on Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot, Pound, Frost, and O'Neill might be considered by an unfriendly reader as typical examples of oversimplification: Hemingway, a secretive and nocturnal writer of magical incantations, is a classicist with a sober and simple style which achieves the maximum effect with a minimum of means; Faulkner, a baroque writer with a frenetic and convulsive style and an excessive love for detail, is an epic poet whose works have not yet been fully explicated; T. S. Eliot, a bourgeois Anglo-Saxon intellectual fidgeting with order and tradition, is a cold monument made up of fragments of diverse architectural styles, trying but failing to comprehend and integrate the present; Pound, a vainglorious Far Western anarchist fooling with experience and innovation, is a master technician who hides behind so many masks that it is difficult to decide which face is his own; Frost, the poet laureate of the United States because he received the Pulitzer prize four times, is, contrary to Eliot and his urban and cosmopolitan school, essentially rural, a dying poet of the soil, archaic, yet determined to survive; O'Neill, a cruel critic of the modern world, hates science, materialism, and businessmen but is no reformer because he believes evil to be part of the human condition. These statements may be accurate, but they are by no means the complete truth. Yet even in a panorama one cannot hope to see every object from all possible angles. The book, as a pioneer effort, is impressive, muscular and often witty. It was awarded the *Goncourt Prix de la Littérature* not because it speaks the last word on modern American literature, but because it speaks, what is equally necessary in France, the first word.

RICHARD COANDA

### Clarity and Irony

*The Life of J. K. Huysmans.* By Robert Baldick. Oxford.

PROFESSOR BALDICK has written a clear, sound, and distinguished life of Huysmans. He has had access to most of the unpublished Huysmansiana; the book has excellent illustrations; and Baldick's irony is an ever-present delight.

With ease and discrimination, Baldick has avoided the various pitfalls of his subject. Thus he has adhered strictly to the writing of a biography, with no more attention to Huysmans books than is appropriate in discussing the life of an author. Each work of Huysmans, however, is rapidly delineated; its contents are summarized; and a host of biographical data is extracted each time. On the other hand, Huysmans was too odd a figure not to have attracted

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the attention of psycho-analysts dabbling in literary criticism, and many strange suggestions have been offered: Baldick is never unaware of these "Freudian fantasies" as he terms them, but he is never tempted into facile excursions. Finally, although Huysmans' works are not always attractive indices to his personality, Baldick has been able to recognize the less appealing aspects without thereby having to stress them (e.g., his discussion of Huysmans' thoughts on the subject of women's armpits, p. 53).

The book is written for the cultivated reader, but preferably one not unacquainted with French letters, for there are meaningful references to other French authors. But, following what seems to be a developing trend, all the quotations are in English. In most instances this does no harm, though one may wonder how many people who will take time to read some 350 pages on Huysmans are going to be unfamiliar with French. On occasion, however, the result is so bizarre as to spoil the otherwise smooth excellence of Baldick's handling. This is particularly the case when he resorts to English slang to render French argot. Whatever Huysmans called official Beaux-Arts pictures, he did not term them 'fiddle-faddle and jiggery-pokery' (p. 47), nor did he refer to the Paris Exposition of 1900 as 'The Mecca of Mugwumperry' (p. 284).

Interesting pages deal with Huysmans' childhood, but as he reaches maturity and begins writing, his books properly come to the fore: it is, after all, for them that Huysmans is known. *En ménage*, Baldick uses principally for "the glimpses it affords of Huysmans' character, his appearance, his home, and his private life" (p. 53). The important art studies are closely analyzed: it was Huysmans who, more than any other author before him, championed the Impressionists. And *A rebours* is placed in its proper framework: with hindsight, the prayer of Des Esseintes has seemed to some a foretaste of Huysmans' conversion, but Baldick rightly stresses that not even Huysmans was able to explain, later, how he had come to write it.

Huysmans' relations with friends were frequently stormy; most unfavorable accounts of his conduct have been current, particularly toward Léon Bloy and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Baldick examines the material very closely and demonstrates convincingly the despicable role of Bloy in his reporting of both relationships. Unless Bloy specialists can adduce new data, it would seem that Huysmans is vindicated and is shown to have been a staunch friend to both men.

His conversion is, naturally, the central event in Huysmans' life and in this biography. Huysmans' investigations of occultism and black magic are here catalogued; more important, they emerge as necessary steps in the conversion, steps which may sometimes have been false or misguided but which were always to satisfy a craving for understandings lying beyond the scope of the world which naturalism envisaged. The conversion gave orientation to Huysmans' searchings, but it left him with many inquiries. The latter half of the book elucidates them: "His problem was, in fact, to find some middle course between an impracticable and an insufferable way of life. It was a problem which was to occupy his attention during most of his remaining years" (p. 201).

Four of his remaining books are of major importance. Of these Baldick equates *En route* to the purgative life, *La Cathédrale* to the contemplative life, and *L'Oblat* to the unitive life. All are based on Huysmans' new-found "mystical naturalism," an attempt to give an account of the soul based on techniques learned from Zola. These three works are frankly autobiographical

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and didactic: the conversion of others, and particularly of the intellectual élite, is their central concern. The problem of suffering was dominant in his thinking and in his life; necessarily it dominated his art, too. He adopted the Dolorist philosophy and in his study of *Sainte Lydwine* perhaps phrased most clearly what he understood this to mean, seeking in it "to throw a little light, however uncertain, upon the dark and terrifying mystery of suffering" (p. 290). Two laws he found fundamental: "the law of solidarity in evil and the law of reversibility in good." And Saint Lydwine fascinated him as the supreme modern example of suffering, accepted as a continuation of the Passion, which could bring man closest to God and which could atone for the evil of others. When the last of these works was finished (*L'Oblat*), it would appear that Huysmans had said all that he had to offer in the novel form: suffering, he here averred, must be met and accepted, not escaped. And he was to display tremendous and moving courage in meeting it himself during the final years of his own life, which were passed in the most intense pain.

The concluding pages eschew any full critical examination of Huysmans' works, but they do offer an explanation for the widespread interest which his books continue to arouse. Baldick sees their autobiographical quality as the basis of their appeal: Huysmans' self-analyses are perhaps the most profound and candid of modern times. Moreover, on a larger plane, each of his works epitomizes a major vital phase of life in the latter years of the nineteenth century. The approval still accorded his style—when the Goncourt have faded and so many object to Zola—Baldick explains by his "extreme truculence," "the sincere expression of a bizarre and tormented personality" (p. 356), which commends the appreciation and affection of readers for, "Suffering gave meaning to Huysmans' life: to his works it gave enduring quality and significance" (p. 357).

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